



# THE MUHAMMADAN REVELATION

BY MUHAMMAD RASHID RIDA

Translation by: Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo



Al-Saadawi Publications

# **The Muhammadan Revelation**

**Muhammad Rashid Rida**

**Translated by  
Yusuf T. DeLorenzo**

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# Introduction

This book, *The Muhammadan Revelation*, may be accounted as one of the best and most important books ever written by Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Rida, may Allah be pleased with him. Rashid Rida will be remembered for his contributions as a leader of the well-known reform movement, *harakat al islah*, at the early part of the twentieth century. In fact, of all those who participated in that movement, people of the stature of Jamal al Din al Afghani, Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, Abd al Raziq, al Kawakibi, al Na'ini, Shakib Arsalan and others, Rashid Rida was the most prolific in terms of the literature he produced.

*The Muhammadan Revelation* enjoys a special place among the works of Muhammad Rashid Rida, including his writings in the monthly journal *al Manar*, which consisted of thirty-six volumes, his Qur'anic commentary *Tafsir al Manar*, and his many other books. For, in this work, *The Muhammadan Revelation*, Shaykh Rashid Rida deals with the most consequential and sensitive issues, and the one at the root of nearly all the differences between the three Abrahamic faiths of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The issue to which I refer, of course, is the issue of revelation itself. In fact, if it were possible for the three faiths to reach something of an agreement on this single matter, it would be possible to resolve the great majority of issues on which they differ. And this is why the issue is such an incredibly important one.

The concept of revelation is one that non-Muslims have allowed to expand to include meanings acquired while in the dream-state, spiritual experiences, a variety of inspirational experiences, and, under some circumstances, even the sort of fleeting insight that seems to come from the unknown. This increase in the scope of the original concept has led the People of the Book to include a great many personalities in the ranks of the prophets and messengers. Islam, on the other hand, has limited the concept of revelation and defined it very carefully, so that it extends only to that sort of contact or exchange with the unknown which is

impossible for people to undertake or understand by normal means. As such, then, revelation is something which is beyond normal human abilities, capacities, or powers. In fact, the Islamic concept of revelation, or *wahy*, is limited to prophetic mission, which is granted by the Almighty to a human being chosen among other human beings to be a prophet, *nabiy*, or a messenger, *rasul*.

When Allah chooses a messenger to carry His messages to humankind, either orally or in the form of scripture, the messenger is further instructed to demonstrate the truthfulness of the message he carries by producing a miracle, after challenging people to produce a miracle of their own. Then, by means of this miracle, the messenger emphasizes the truth of his claim to prophethood and the veracity of the message he brings from Allah. In this manner, it becomes impossible for imposters to back up their false claims and spurious messages. A prophet, then, is a person chosen by Allah to receive revelation and who is then supported in that claim by a miracle sent by Allah. In addition, the Almighty will further support His messenger by preparing the hearts of certain people to listen to the message, of certain people to listen to and accept it, and of certain others to actually go to the aid of the prophet and support him in disseminating the message.

From his definition of the concept of revelation, Shaykh Rashid Rida was able to present the Qur'an to the people of the twentieth century, and to those of the West in particular, as a divine and eternal miracle, and then to explain how the expanded concept of revelation as understood in the West had opened the door to all manner of exaggerations and depredations in the name of religion. Most important, Rashid Rida's landmark work, *The Muhammadan Revelation*, explains how, if this single point could be clarified, the different Abrahamic faiths may be understood as links in a single chain, each complementing and supporting the other.

The book I present to the reader today, despite all the years that have passed since it was first written, remains as new as when it was first published. Moreover, its importance to students

and scholars has in no way diminished, for it remains a wellspring of knowledge, particularly in the fields of theology, religion, and comparative religion, and in its definitions of key concepts such as revelation, prophethood, faith, and miracles.

The book has also had the good fortune to be translated by a very capable American scholar of Islam and of its classical disciplines, a man whose understanding of the subjects covered in this important and valuable book is as vast as it is profound. His, in fact, is the unique ability to project the meanings intended by the author into language that clearly conveys the author's intent to the reader. I have no doubt that his efforts have, in fact, increased the value of the book.

In closing, I pray to the Almighty and ask Him to bless the learned author for the work he produced, and to bless the translator and the publisher for their efforts in bringing the book to the attention of those who read English.

Taha Jabir al 'Alwani  
President, International Institute  
of Islamic Thought  
November 1995

## Translator's Introduction

In introducing this work to the English-reading public, it is first necessary to introduce its author, Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Rida. This is not to say that English-reading Muslims are not familiar with the name. On the contrary, the name of Rashid Rida is very well known throughout the Muslim world. But, like the work of his well known teacher, Muhammad Abduh, Rida's work has remained open in the main only to those who can read the original Arabic.

Rashid Rida was born in 1865 (1282 AH) at al Qalmun in the Syrian province of Tripoli. His early schooling was undertaken both in his home province and in Beirut, and he studied for some time with Shaykh Husayn al Jisr. In his youth, Rida showed a flair for the Arabic language, and began his literary career as a poet and journalist. In 1897, he went to Egypt and became the student and constant companion of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh whom he had met earlier in Beirut. In Egypt Rida began editing the monthly journal, *al Manar*, devoted to disseminating Abduh's and his own ideas on social and religious reform. In time, this journal, with its emphasis on treating contemporary issues from Shari'ah perspectives, became the most influential of all intellectual forums in the Muslim world.

In 1908 Rida visited Syria. As he was speaking on the *minbar* of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, he was shouted down by those opposed to his reformist ideas. Returning to Cairo, Rida established a school called Madrasah al Da'wah wa al Irshad. It was attended by many students who, in later years, would become influential in the reform of Islamic institutions in Egypt, including al Azhar.

Following a brief interlude in Syria, before the French chased him out in 1920, Rida settled in Cairo, though he made several journeys to India, the Hijaz, and Europe. He died in Cairo in 1935. His lifelong friend and fellow reformer, Shakib Arsalan wrote the definitive biography of Rida's life, entitled: *al Sayyid Rashid Rida aw Ikha Arba'in Sannah* (Sayyid Rashid Rida or Forty Years of Friendship).

Rashid Rida is perhaps best known as the author of the unfinished twelve-volume Qur'anic commentary *Tafsir al Manar*. Among

his other works are *al Khilafah wa al Imamah al 'Uzma* (Caliphate and the Great Imamate), *al Wahhabiyun wa al Hijaz*, *Tarikh al Ustadh al Imam Muhammad Abduh* (The Biography of the Teacher and Imam Muhammad Abduh), *Nida li al Jins al Latif* (A Call to the Fairer Sex), *Muhawarat al Muslih wa al Muqallid* (Conversations of a Reformer and an Unquestioning Follower), *Dhikra al Mawlid al Nabawi* (In Remembrance of the Prophet's Birthday), *Shubuhāt al Nasara wa Hujaj al Islam* (Christian Doubts and the Arguments of Islam), and the present volume, *al Wahy al Muhammadi*.

Many of these works have been published and republished all over the Arab-speaking world, making Rashid Rida a household name, and one that comes immediately to mind when the reformational efforts of the early twentieth century are recalled. Of all of Rida's works, however, only a very few have been translated. *The Muhammadan Revelation* is in all likelihood the one that has been most widely translated. It has been translated into Urdu, Chinese, German, French, Turkish, Persian, and now English.

It may be necessary to explain something about the title, *The Muhammadan Revelation*. To nearly all English-speaking Muslims, "Muhammadan" is offensive, for it was used by Christian colonialists as a synonym for Muslim; in the same way that followers of Christ call themselves as Christians. Muslims have always objected to being called 'Muhammadans' for the usage implies a certain parallelism with the Christian usage, and the underlying assumption that the reason they call themselves Christians is that they are worshippers of Christ. Muslims are clearly not worshippers of Muhammad! And thus the insistence on the distinction.

Within Islam, however, there is certainly a great deal of love for the Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace, and for his entire family, and for his companions as well. Thus, Islamic literature in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and many other languages is full of instances in which the adjectival noun is used; the Muhammadan soul, the Muhammadan heart, the Muhammadan spirit, and so on are widely used, particularly in poetry. But the reference is to the Prophet himself, rather than to Muslims, believers, or people of faith. It is this usage that is intended in the title—in the sense that the Revelation being described is actually the revelation attributed to

the Prophet Muhammad, and not the revelation of so-called "Muhammadanism." In most places today, "Muhammadanism" is no longer a part of anyone's vocabulary. Muslims may be still be known as Moslems in English speaking parts of the world, but not as Muhammadans. Still, for some, the bad taste lingers.

While we are on the subject of lingering unpleasantness, let us consider the tone of this volume, which is polemical in nature. While it may contain nothing truly offensive to our brothers and sisters from among the "People of the Book," it was written in an age of resentment and distrust when the Muslim world was struggling to regain its freedom from European colonization and colonialism. Rida himself, a proponent of rapprochement with the West, had been badly let down by the European experience; World War I in particular came as a terrible shock to Rida, who believed that European thought and philosophy were quite enlightened, and even compatible with Islamic principles and teachings. Europe's other face, that of the pragmatic, almost Machiavellian, politician and colonial administrator, repulsed Rida. Thus, when we find him in this book addressing the French orientalist, d'Armougan, we cannot help but discern that Rida's tone is adversarial.

I have attempted, while remaining true to the original, to emphasize the positive and the universal elements of Rida's work. Sometimes this has required liberties with language, and sometimes the selective pruning of text! Nonetheless, I have in no way upset the balance between responsible scholarship and the spirit of understanding that exists between Muslims and the People of the Book. After all, the author's purpose was to promote an understanding of Islam and its Prophet, upon him be peace, through an appeal to the followers of all "revealed" religion to view the issue from the perspective of a shared or common doctrinal ground—that of divine revelation. *The Muhammadan Revelation* represents, above all, a learned and informed Muslim perspective on that issue. The book was clearly a labor of love for its author, and as such it cannot fail to appeal to those who approach it with open minds.

Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo  
November 1995



## CHAPTER ONE

# Revelation, Prophethood, and Mission

### The Lexical and Shari'ah Meanings of Revelation

The author of the Arabic dictionary, *al Asas*, wrote that there is more than one root word for revelation, and that its lexical meaning is to inform someone of something which you keep hidden from others. In this manner, Allah informed His prophets. In the Qur'an it is written that:

Your Lord informed the bees (16:69).

Raghib, in his dictionary of Qur'anic vocabulary wrote that the root of the word for revelation means a quick indication. In keeping with this meaning, the Arabs used the root in a metaphorical phrase meaning a matter that is over quickly. Such an indication may be made by a simple word, or through a gesture, or in writing. It is in this sense that the word is used in the verse about Zakaria.

And he went out to his people from the *mihrab* and indicated to them that they should say His praises morning and evening (19:11), i.e. he gestured to them without speaking.

To summarize the lexical meaning of revelation: it is to quickly disclose something special to a certain person only, so that it is hidden from others. Among this sort of disclosure is that which is communicated naturally, like the revelation to the bees. Another of this sort is the inspiration which is communicated to those people whose characters are pure, like the mother of Musa (Moses). Still another sort is the prompting of Satan. In the Qur'an it is written:

And the satanic reveal [things] to their associates so that they may dispute with you (6:121).

and:

In this way, We made enemies to every prophet, satanic humans and jinn who insidiously communicate to one another embellished words (6:112).

The revelation communicated by Allah to His prophets contains elements of both meanings of this root, i.e. quick and hidden indication. So this is the meaning of the infinitive. The infinitive is also used to denote the object, or the revelation which is communicated, i.e. Allah's revelation to His prophets and that which He informed them of concerning the unknown, injunctions, and rulings. At times, this revelation took the form of writs, and at others it did not.

In like manner, Allah reveals commands to His angels.

When your Lord revealed to the angels: Verily I am with you! So give support to those who have faith (8:12).

Likewise, Allah reveals to the angel of revelation that which the angel reveals to the prophets.

So He revealed to His servant what he revealed (53:10), i.e. Allah revealed to the angel Jibril what Jibril in turn revealed to Muhammad, upon him be peace.

Our teacher, the shaykh and imam (Muhammad Abduh), wrote in his treatise on *tawhid*, after defining revelation in lexical terms, that:

In the Shari'ah, revelation has been defined as Allah's disclosure of Shari'ah injunctions to His prophets. As for us, we may define it in our terms as the knowledge one finds within one's self in the certainty that it has come from Allah

either directly or by means of an intermediary. This may come about through a sound that one hears, or without sound. The difference between revelation and inspiration is that inspiration is a sensation of which one may be inwardly certain and, without sensing it or knowing from whence it came, may feel impelled by. In this way, it resembles the sensations of hunger, thirst, sorrow, and happiness.

This definition includes the three kinds of revelation alluded to in the following verse of the Qur'an.

It is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, or [by a voice, as it were,] from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal]; for, verily, He is exalted, wise (42:51).

Here, then, revelation is referred to as (1) an inward sensation, or a meaning one finds in one's heart, and (2) as words spoken as if from behind a veil, so that one hears without seeing, in the way that Musa heard Allah's call from behind the bush, and (3) as that which is communicated from Allah by means of the angel of revelation to the Prophet; in which case the Prophet may see the angel in human form, or not see him, or hear him, or receive the communication in his heart.

The above definition (before differentiating between revelation and inspiration) includes what is termed by some scholars as "personal revelation" or inspiration which flows into exceedingly refined souls. Certain western scholars have ascribed this sort of "personal revelation" to the Prophet Muhammad, upon him peace, and to others. According to them, Muhammad could not have been false in his call to a religion of truth, justice, and high morality. Those among them who do not believe in the unseen suppose that his knowledge, ideas, and expectations created within him a sort of inspiration which flowed from his subliminal self, with its highly refined religious sensibilities, into his conscious mind. Then he believed these meanings to take the form of an angel he sometimes

heard and sometimes saw, and he received whatever was disclosed to him by that inner angel.

Thus, the difference between us is in regard to whether revelation originated outside the person of the Prophet and was, as it were, sent down to him from heaven; or whether its origins lay within his person; as to whether the angel had a separate spiritual existence and was sent by Allah or whether it existed only in Muhammad's imagination.

Behold, this [divine revelation] is from the Sustainer of all the worlds, the trustworthy soul has alighted with it from on high upon your heart, so that you may be among those who give warning in the clear Arabic tongue (26:191-3).

In what follows, I shall explain this presumption, clarify the doubts that led to it, and then refute it. I shall also establish that the Qur'an was revealed by Allah from on high, and that it could not possibly have originated from within the person of Muhammad, upon him be peace. This will be the subject of this book.

The theologians categorize the divine attribute of speech as (1) internal, which is eternal, self-existent, and without letter, sound, order, or language; and (2) vocalized, which is what was revealed to the prophets, upon them be peace, including the four books (the Qur'an, Injil [New Testament], Torah, and Zabur [The Psalms]). The controversy between the theologians in regard to whether or not Allah's speech was created was completely a matter of theoretical philosophy that was never addressed in either the Qur'an or the Sunnah. In fact, it has to do with analytical inquiry into the nature of Allah's essence and attributes and, as such, only serves to call up doubts and the whisperings of Satan. Therefore, it should be avoided. Rather, it should suffice for us to believe that speech is one of the attributes of Allah's perfection and that it is connected to Allah's knowing. It should be noted, however, that the attribute of knowing embraces all that can be known; whereas speech embraces His revealing to the world whatever He wishes to be known, and to whomever. Allah may be characterized as perfect in knowing and in imparting knowledge, and as perfect in speech and in speaking.

These attributes, moreover, and the others which He ascribed to Himself in the texts of the Qur'an in no way contradict His immunity from all compositeness, nor do they mean that He is subject to the shortcomings and imperfections of His servants, or that He in any way resembles them in the attributes He has granted to them. Similarity in name does not mean similarity in nature. His person is perfect, whereas the persons of His creation are not. And His existence is higher than theirs. His attributes are higher than those of His creation. His knowledge is more perfect, and His prophet's knowledge is more perfect than that of His creation. We must, therefore, have faith in what He and His prophets have taught us, without adding or subtracting, and without denying His attributes, without drawing comparisons, and without making far-fetched interpretations. No one must attempt to impose their own opinions on the nature of His being or attributes, or on the way that He calls and communicates to His prophets, or on His existence or what results from it. This was the understanding, long before the theologians and their controversies, of the Prophet's Companions, the scholars of the succeeding generation, and the imams of hadith and *fiqh*.

## The Prophet

### *The Lexical and Shari'ah Meanings of Prophethood and the Difference between Prophet and Messenger*

In the Arabic language the word for prophet, *nabiy*, is an attribute from the infinitive *naba'*, to give useful information about something of importance. The form of the word *nabiy* may be used either as an active or a passive participle, i.e., the prophet both receives and gives Allah's communications. The word *nabiy* may also be derived from the infinitive *nubuwwah* meaning elevated, noble. In biblical usage, a prophet may be one who is inspired to give information about unknown matters in the future. It is also said that in ancient Hebrew the meaning of the word for prophet is any one who speaks with a loud voice, either in general or in reference to matters of legislation. Our belief is that the word refers to

those to whom Allah has sent revelation, *wahy*. Then, if the recipient is commanded to deliver the revelation to others, the recipient is a messenger. Then, every messenger is a prophet, but not every prophet is a messenger. The verse in the Qur'an:

Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of all the Prophets (33:40),

means that both prophethood and mission came to an end after Muhammad, upon him be peace. Everyone who claimed or claims to be a prophet of Allah after him is a liar and a deceiver. Many have made such a claim, and all have been exposed.

Nor has anyone who claimed to be a prophet after Muhammad brought any sort of religious reform of benefit to humankind. Rather, their writings and sayings may be seen to be full of praise for themselves and rife with outlandish claims designed only to deceive and enslave common people. In fact, the same is true of those who claim to have become *wali* or friends of Allah with the ability to benefit people spiritually and otherwise. Yet, all of this is refuted by what has been revealed in the Qur'an and by Allah's prophets in general, and by the Seal of the Prophets in particular. All this, too, will be mentioned later in this book. I shall also deal with what is authentically known about the Prophet's humility and dislike of praise. Finally, the reader will see in this book that the message brought by the Qur'an and explained by the Sunnah more than suffices the needs of humankind for spiritual uplift and guidance.

## **Humankind's Need for Prophetic Mission: and the Foundations of the Religion of the Prophets**

Generally speaking, the need of humankind for the guidance of the prophets is that acquired knowledge, through the senses or through reason, is not enough for them to know about the three main reasons for prophetic missions. For such knowledge humankind is dependent on their Lord and Creator.

The first of these matters is faith in the unseen, *al ghayb*. At the forefront of that faith is Allah's unicity, *tawhid*; His attributes of per-



fection and His immunity from imperfection, which leads to the duty of His servants to worship Him, to show Him their gratitude, and to remember Him. These are the things that may be accounted the highest form of self-purification. These are followed by faith in the angels and the revelation they bring, and by the order ordained by Allah for the universe and creation. In all of these matters it is necessary to rely on what has been revealed in the texts [of the Qur'an and the Sunnah].

Among the matters taught by the prophets concerning the unseen is that whatever people find within themselves of evil, or evil promptings, is in fact from Satan. The reason for informing humankind of this truth is to enable them to take themselves to account, and to distinguish between what is true and what is false, between good and evil. This information is the greatest possible aid for them in their attempt to purify themselves. In my commentary of the Qur'an, I have elaborated on this subject at length, comparing the physical existence of the jinn to microbes, and their evil influence on the souls of humans to the influence of bacteria on the body. Thousands of years of history have passed without humans being aware of these things, of their influence on their health, or on the things they eat and drink.

In the eighteenth century certain of the materialist philosophers spoke of independent souls for human beings, in the way that the prophets informed humankind. They also spoke of means of detecting the presence of non-material spirits, thinking these to be spirits of the dead. Personally, I think that they were referring to satanic spirits, but this is not the place to discuss this matter in detail even though it has long remained a point of dispute. What I seek to do here is give a general definition of prophetic mission.

It is a well known fact that the most mature minds in the affairs of the world are those possessed by international statesmen in the West. Yet, you will find that the most they are capable of doing is to harness the wealth and the knowledge of their people for the purpose of fighting and destroying their enemies. Is their political acumen not the sort referred to in the following verse?

By Allah [O Prophet], even before your time We sent messengers to the nations; but Satan has made their doings seem

goodly to them; and he is close to them today. Great suffering will be theirs. Nor have We revealed to you this book except that you may explain to them that over which they differ, and as guidance and mercy to a people who have faith (16:63-64).

The second matter pertains to belief in the afterlife, in judgment and retribution for faith and deeds. This is the second reason, after faith in Allah and knowledge of Him, for following the truth, and establishing justice on earth, and doing good and refraining from its opposite. The third matter is placing limits [on human behavior] and legislating things that cannot be fathomed by mere reason, so as to bring together rather than to separate, and to regulate outward and inward conduct.

In summary, then, to civilize humans through religion faith in the unseen is required, and knowledge brought by the prophets. Humans will never be civilized through material or acquired knowledge alone. This is a theme that will be repeated throughout this book.

## **The Sinlessness of the Prophets**

Since prophets are sent to guide human beings with regard to how they might purify themselves and thereby benefit the prophets in their worldly lives, as well as prepare themselves for a higher existence in the afterlife, it is essential that the prophets (as the bearers of this guidance) be worthy of emulation in their deeds and their characters. This is why the scholars have declared that the sinlessness (*'ismah*) of the prophets is a fundament of our faith. The prophets neither committed sins nor were their characters flawed. Some scholars have gone so far as to declare that the prophets were incapable of committing even minor acts of wrongdoing, both before and after they were called to their prophetic missions. Certain other scholars have amended this assertion to extend only to the sort of minor acts of wrongdoing caused by degeneracy.

The People of the Book, however, maintain no such belief. Their sacred scriptures accuse some of the greatest prophets of commit-

ting the most offensive kinds of wrongdoing, things that are totally contrary to their roles as exemplars for humankind.

The Christians even consider a prophet's wrongdoing as proof of their beliefs. This is because, to them, Isa (Jesus) was God, and the only one who could be without sin. According to their beliefs, Isa was the savior of humankind and the one who died for the sins of all the children of Adam, and thus there is no other savior. This is because a sinner cannot be expected to be the saviour of other sinners, if he is one of them. But this is a pagan belief that contradicts the religion revealed by the prophets and the writs they brought to humankind. Rather, the origin of such a belief is surely idolatry.

Even so, the books of the Old and New Testament (which they hold sacred and which we believe to have been altered) do not support their claims that all of the prophets had committed wrongdoing, much less that they were sinners. The prophet Yahya (John the Baptist) is described [in the scriptures] as without sin. In fact, the New Testament indicate that he was greater in purity than Isa.

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; an he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).

Of him, Isa said:

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11).

In the same scriptures it is written:

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say He hath a devil The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners (Matthew 11:18-19).

Yet, these same scriptures tell us that Isa insulted his mother and brothers when they had come to speak with him, explaining that they were opposed to his father's will.

Then one said to him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? (Matthew 13:47-48; Mark 3:32-33).

Yes, it is true that his brothers did not believe in him, as attested to at other places in the scriptures. But was the same true of his mother? And was she deserving of that sort of contempt?

The divine teaching is that children respect their parents at all times, even if their parents are idolators. And the mother of Isa is venerated above all women! The laws and codes of behavior in all revealed religions forbid disrespect for one's mother. Also, excessive wine drinking is considered sinful even in the religious traditions which do not prohibit it outright. According to these scriptures, Satan possessed Isa for forty days, tempting him and calling him to his service. Yet, we hold Isa innocent of all these accusations.

The scriptures also tell us that John baptised people and urged them to repent. In fact, he baptised Isa himself. Of Yahya's parents, Zakaria and his wife, the scripture says;

They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless (Luke 1:6),

which clearly attests to their lack of sin.

Many of the prophets mentioned in the Old Testament were likewise without sin. In many cases, they were said to be free of even minor wrongdoing. When Adam made his mistake, he had not yet been made a prophet, nor had he been sent to guide an erring people. He had simply forgotten that he was not to eat from the tree. Rather, the entire incident was designed to serve as an example that humankind is subject to both intentional and unintentional sin and righteousness, as well as to demonstrate that sin may be forgiven through repentance and Allah's mercy. Adam's two sons, Qabil (Cain) and Habil (Abel) exemplified these two possibilities. The scriptures testify to Abel's sinlessness and innocence even though he was not a prophet.

Then the Qur'an came as to verify the earlier scriptures, and explained what I have summarized above concerning Adam. Moreover, in its stories of the prophets, the Qur'an stressed their righteousness and held them up as moral and ethical examples.

And We made them leaders who would guide in accordance with Our behest. We inspired them to do good works, and to be constant in prayer, and to give zakah; and Us alone did they worship (21:73).

After listing the best known of them, the Qur'an said;

These are people whom Allah has guided; Follow, then, their guidance (6:90).

In explanation of the verses about the Seal of the Prophets:

Verily, We have opened for you a manifest victory. So that Allah may forgive you your past and future faults, and bestow upon you the full measure of His blessings (48:1-2),

and:

...ask forgiveness for your faults and for the faults of all believing men and women (47:19).

The root of the word used [in these verses] for fault, *dhanb* originally designates an animal's tail. Later, it came to be used for any deed or action with damaging results, or contrary to one's interests. For example, when the Prophet, upon him be peace, used his own judgment to allow certain of the hypocrites to remain behind while the rest of the men went to war at Tabuk, Allah rebuked him:

May Allah pardon you! Why did you grant them permission before it had become obvious to you who was speaking the truth and you knew who the liars were? (9:43).

The sinlessness of the prophets is in reference to their not sinning against Allah by opposing (or acting contrary to) the divine

revelation. For, if the prophets sinned against Him, their followers would similarly be required to sin against Him, because they were ordered to follow the example of the prophets. Of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an stated:

Verily, in the Prophet of Allah you have an example for everyone who looks forward with hope to Allah and the last day, and remembers Allah unceasingly (33:21).

### **How Reason and Acquired Knowledge are Insufficient as Means of Knowing the Guidance Brought by the Prophets**

It might be said that belief in the Unseen and the existence of the Lord are inherent in human nature, or that such belief may come about through inspiration to people of advanced perceptions. And it is true that certain philosophers reached a point in their reasoning where they proved the existence of the necessarily existent and its knowledge and wisdom, and the necessity of praising, thanking, and worshipping it. Some philosophers even taught that the soul remains after death in eternal bliss or torment, and thus proposed ethical standards and legislation for individuals and society.

But while all of this may be true, historically and at the present time, there are many differences between the knowledge and wisdom brought by the prophets and that attained by the philosophers. The sources of both are different, the degree to which they can be trusted, their authenticity, and their influence on the souls of all those they address.

Essentially, the wisdom and teachings of philosophers are no more than imperfect human opinions and theories which cannot even approach the Unseen, except to state that it exists and is unknown. Obviously, such opinion is open to dispute and argumentation incomprehensible except to certain groups of people. And not all of those who can follow the arguments actually accept them! And not all of those who accept the arguments actually give them preference over their own desires and inclinations. Such arguments have no power over the perceptions of their followers, and



they certainly have no influence over their faith. The basic reason for this is that humans are naturally reluctant to believe in or to submit in faith to those who share their humanity, even when those are clearly more learned and wiser than they are. Rather, they will believe in those in whom they suppose to reside hidden powers and an innate ability, beyond the normal, to cause benefit or detriment.

Take the example of a servant, student, and admirer of the philosopher, Ibn Sina. This man was amazed that Ibn Sina was a follower of the Prophet Muhammad for, in the admirer's opinion, Ibn Sina was far more learned and advanced than the Prophet.

Ibn Sina, for his part, would openly chide his servant and rebuke him. Anyway, one cold and snowy night in Ispahan, Ibn Sina awoke before dawn and asked his servant to bring water for his ablutions. The servant, however, excused himself, citing the extreme weather conditions. A little later, when the call to prayer was being made, Ibn Sina again awoke his servant and requested water. But again the servant made his excuses. Just as he was doing so, the muezzin was crying out: "I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah!"

So Ibn Sina said to his servant, "Listen! Do you hear what the muezzin is saying?"

The servant replied, "He's saying that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah."

Ibn Sina then said, "The time has come for me to explain to you how mistaken you have been. Look, you are my servant, and have no duties other than to serve me. Moreover, no one is more lavish in his praise of me, or their respect for my abilities, than you are. You even admit to preferring me over the Prophet, upon him be peace, and wonder why I should believe in him and openly follow his way. Yet, in spite of all that, you oppose my will in the simplest of chores I ask you to perform for me inside this house for the reason that it is cold outside. Yet, that simple Persian muezzin leaves his home before dawn, and then climbs to the top of the minaret, which is easily the coldest place in the entire city. Then, when it appears to him that the time for *fajr* prayer has arrived, he gives the call to prayer in which he mentions the Arabian prophet, Muham-mad, some four and a half centuries after his mission. And all of this he does out of faith, submission, admiration, and the desire for reward in the after-

life. So, consider this, and think about it on your own. Hopefully, you'll discover for yourself the difference between the power of a prophet over people and the power of knowledge and philosophy."

So, one of the greatest distinctions of the guidance brought by revelation over acquired knowledge is the way that people in all walks of life can submit to it. This is how revelation can become widespread and leave no room for opposition or even for dispute about it, as long as it is properly understood. For this reason, we see that people who have an incorrect understanding of religion, so that they have abandoned or nearly abandoned their faith, will not benefit from the teachings of philosophy or science.

In our own age, science and philosophy (or ideology) have become widespread in ways that were unknown in history. People are no longer willing to submit to kings and nobles, or to brilliant scholars, or profound philosophers. Rather, values, etiquette, and society have become chaotic. Never before have wealth, reputation and even blood been so lightly valued, with the result that communities and nations have become subject to all manner of corruption.

Even so, the majority of humankind believe in the existence and wisdom of God. Moreover, most educated people in the world today believe in His oneness. Generally speaking, the only scope left for idolatry is in the blind faith of those who follow religions falsely ascribed to the prophets. Such beliefs, of course, have nothing to do with the original teachings of the prophets. Rather, they are anathema to those teachings, and especially to the teachings about His Oneness or unicity, *tawhid*. In fact, the sort of idolatry that comes from belief in the sanctity of saints, beliefs which often lead to absurd rituals and corrupted ideals, is at the core of doubt regarding true religion. Thus, the majority of humankind either believe in corrupted teachings or they reject religion and revelation outright. Both groups need to go back to the guidance of true religion, which can only come from Islam.

The religion to which most of humankind belongs in the present age is Christianity. The reason for its popularity is that governments have made it a part of life in the social order. Even so, its spiritual influence is confined in the main to women and fanatics. Even so, before this chapter went to press, news came from Ger-

many, one of the most advanced nations on earth, that people are again protesting against the Old Testament, and urging that the teachings of the New Testament be purged of mythology and made to accord with their nationalistic German and ethnic Aryan beliefs and culture, so that no trace of Semetic influence remains. Yet, their prophets, their saviour, and their God are all semetic in origin! Even so, their aim is to santify their war dead and their Germanic ancestors. Clearly, then, this is no different from the idolatry of the Japanese. Yet, in this manner, they fuel the fires of hatred between themselves and the rest of Europe.

Thus, in the present day, there is no way to save humanity except through the Muhammadan revelation which unifies all of humankind, promotes the ideal of a common humanity, perfects human nature, and guarantees bliss in this world and the next. I have explained in this book that Muhammad was the Last of the Prophets of God sent to all of humankind as a mercy to all the worlds. Through him, upon him be peace, the Almighty perfected true religion and abolished all notions of ethnicism, nationalism, and racism. Belief in [the Muhammadan revelation] is the only proven cure to the social ills which threaten the world today. It is my hope that by means of this book Allah will open the doors to guidance to all those with the ability to understand, with the freedom to think for themselves, and with desire to know the truth and reform humankind accordingly. Such are the people referred to in the verse:

Now there has come unto you from God a light, and a clear scripture, through which Allah shows unto all that seek His goodly acceptance the paths leading to salvation and, by His grace, brings them out of the darkness into the light and guides them on a straight path (5:15-16).

## CHAPTER TWO

# Prophethood in Christianity and Islam

Any rational person who has read the scriptures of the People of the Book, commonly known as the Old and New Testaments, and who is also familiar with the books of the Sunnah and the Prophet's biography will know with certainty that no one could possibly believe that those scriptures (the Old and New Testaments) were revealed by Allah, or that those who authored those scriptures were sinless prophets. In the same way, no legal expert could possibly deny the legal genius of Abu Hanifah or Imam Shafi. And no grammarian could ever deny the grammatical and lexical genius of Sibaway or Ibn Jinni. Like-wise, no poet could deny the poetic genius of a Radi or a Buhtari. The same could be said of medical experts, philosophers, mathematicians, and astronomers in regard to the genius of the pioneers and great ones in their respective fields. Indeed, the same would be true in regard to every person in possession of their senses and reason. No person possessing the sense of sight could possibly deny what his/her own senses tell him/her by supposing that the light of the moon was somehow greater than the light of the sun, or that a lamp's light was stronger than the light of day.

How true the verses of the poet, Busayri!

*Allah is Great! Surely the religion of Muhammad,  
And the Book he brought are more powerful and true.  
Do not even mention the earlier scriptures,  
Morning has come. So, snuff out the candles.*

Even western scholars who grew up in the Christian tradition, those who have studied it and are recognized as scholars, have admitted the same when they learned the truth about Islam.

Professor Edward Montaine, the orientalist and scholar of eastern languages at the University of Geneva, wrote in the introduction to his French translation of the Quran:

Muhammad, like the prophets of the Old Testament, was a true prophet. Like them, he had visions and received revelation. In the same way that religious belief and the idea of a divine creator were firmly established in the persons of the earlier prophets, so also with Muhammad. These elements led them and him to the sort of spiritual states and strength of character that eventuate within the human mind to visions and revelation.

This European free-thinker stated that all the elements in the prophets of Israel were present in Muhammad. We will further state that all the characteristics of prophethood found in the prophets of Israel were found in their most perfect form in Muhammad. However, this scholar summarized the narration of how revelation came to Muhammad from Islamic sources, admitting their authenticity. After him, the French orientalist Emile d'Armongam used Islamic sources in his *The Life of Muhammad* to explain the influence of Muhammad's prophetic mission on the reform of humanity. In doing so, he not only conceded their authenticity but also tried to reconcile Muslims and Christians, lamenting the gulf between them.

I will give the definition of revelation and prophethood of a western scholar noted for his mastery of history and the modern and religious sciences, Dr. George Post, the famous author of the *Biblical Dictionary*. One may then form an opinion on the prophethood and revelation of the Israel's prophets and then about the prophethood and revelation of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets.

## Christian Definitions of Revelation and Prophethood

In explanation of the meaning of revelation in the *Biblical Dictionary* published in Arabic, the following was written:

This is used to denote prophethood that is confined to a certain city or people. And this is the major kind of revelation,

which means that it is a sign for the people. In general, the meaning of revelation is inspiration. In this sense, it is said that all those who authored the scriptures were inspired; which means that the spirit of God entered the spirits of the Old Testament writers, in the following ways:

- to inform them of spiritual truths or future events which they would otherwise not know except by this means.
- to guide them in recording well-known events or established truths, and to speak them aloud or record them in writing, free of error. In this wise, it is said that God's sacred people speak with the authority of the Holy Spirit. The speaker or writer loses nothing of his personality in doing so, but is rather influenced by the Holy Spirit so that he uses his own abilities and characteristics in accordance with Divine instructions.

It is for this reason that we may see in the authors of the scriptures individual characteristics and styles. There are difficulties in explaining these teachings, and scholars have differed in their interpretations. Even so, Christians agree that God sent revelation to all of these writers, so that they could record His will and inform humankind of its responsibilities in terms of belief and practice, and thereby achieve eternal salvation.

The terms prophethood and prophet are explained as follows:

Prophethood ... [means] of giving information about God or matters of religion, especially what will take place in the Hereafter. Harun (Aaron) was called a prophet because he was, owing to his eloquence, the spokesperson for Musa.<sup>1</sup>

The Old Testament prophets called people to the law of Musa and popularized the coming of a savior. In the days of Samwil

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<sup>1</sup> See Exodus 7:1.



(Samuel), when people had lost interest in soothsayers, a school was established in Ramah and its students were called Sons of the Prophets. Thus Samwil became well known for reviving the law, and his name is mentioned in connection with Musa and Harun in many places in the scriptures. Other schools of prophets were established in Baytil and Jericho. The head of the school was called father, and courses taught included commentary on the Torah, music, and poetry. This is why most of the prophets were poets capable of singing and playing instruments. The purpose of these schools was to prepare students capable of teaching the masses. The lifestyles of the prophets and the sons of the prophets were often extremely austere, and many of them did menial work for a living.

It appears that many of these students were never granted the power of prophesying the future. Rather, this special office was given by God to certain people in accordance with His will, and He would promise them special guidance with which to carry out their important responsibilities. Certain inspired prophets were favored with revelation although they had never studied at those schools, or anywhere else, like Amos who was a shepherd and a fruit picker.

There were different kinds of prophethood, like dreams, visions, and glimpses into the future, without the prophet's knowing exactly what or when. As a result, it often happened that their visions of distant events would be associated with nearer events, like their association of the liberation of the Jews from the Assyrians with the salvation of the world by means of the Messiah, or the victory of Alexander with the coming of the Messiah, or the destruction of Jerusalem with the events of the Judgment Day. God sent His inspired prophets to make His will known, to reform society, and especially to tell of the coming of the Messiah. The prophets were a great force in teaching the people, instructing them, and guiding them to the truth. They were also very influential in politics.

## **Objections to Prophethood as Defined by the Christians**

The definition of inspiration as something in which the spirit of God enters the spirits of the inspired is an arbitrary Christian doc-

trine and was not known by or admitted to by the prophets or scholars among the Children of Israel. As such, it cannot be proved or defended against charges that the writers of the Old Testament contradicted themselves or recorded information incompatible with the facts. The author of the dictionary alluded to this when he said that "there are difficulties in explaining these teachings, and scholars have differed in their interpretations." Moreover, if the spirit of God enters the spirit of a person, that means that the person becomes God, for that was the way, according to the Christians, that Isa became God. How, then, if the writers became God, could they contradict themselves or write about what never happened in fact?

The points that detract from the definitions of prophet and prophethood are as follow:

1. Most of the prophets of Israel graduated from special schools at which they learned the law, music, and poetry, so that they became accomplished poets, singers, and players of instruments with the ability to influence people with their words and stir their souls. It should come as no surprise, then, that the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah were wine stewards for the King of Babylon and singers at his court, or that they used their music to influence the King to allow them and their people to return to their homeland and establish their religion there. In other words, prophethood was defined as something like a craft which could be learned in school, and which could further be bolstered by poetic fancy, inspired rhetoric, and lilting music. What has any of this to do with the prophethood of Muhammad, who never studied and never spoke poetry? In fact, Muhammad brought greater things on his own than all of the prophets before him put together.

2. Many of these "prophets" and their sons were mendicants who lived on the hospitality of anyone who, out of respect for the pious, would put them up. This is somewhat akin to the Sufis in our own tradition. Yet, it is well known that such people will accept anything that their hosts have to

say, and believe whatever they claim. Indeed, their own scriptures have ascribed all manner of wrongdoing to them. Thus, there is much in the stories of the Sufis and other Muslim ascetics that demonstrates their superiority to many of these so-called "prophets." How, then, could any one of them rise to the level of Muhammad—either in terms of his innate spiritual purity or of his way of life—when he was never a burden on other people, either before or after his prophethood!

3. The most well known forms of their prophethood were dreams, visions, and reveries, all of which occurred to others than themselves. Yet, the fulfilled prophetic dream marked the beginning of Muhammad's prophethood, before the stage when legislation was revealed to him at a more sublime level, which will be explained later on. Visions are actually mental pictures that are open to interpretation, so that it is only the true prophet who is capable of distinguishing the true interpretation from the false. Examples of this are the dream had by the King of Egypt which was interpreted by Yusuf (Joseph), and Joseph's own dream when he was still a boy.

4. Very often it happened that their prophecies about the future, prophecies which they used to prove that they spoke with God's authority, did not distinguish between times and events, so that these would become confused, and nearly impossible to interpret until after something takes place to clarify the meaning. This is the case in every age with astrologers and soothsayers, and even with the spiritually gifted. Among these prophecies are those which are contradicted by events. The author of the *Dictionary* indicated this without elaborating on it. But history has provided ample elaboration.

The greatest prophecy of all those prophets concerned their prophecies about the Messiah and the King of Israel. In fact, the

Jews are still waiting for him.<sup>2</sup> Then, there was the prophecy of the Messiah himself concerning the end of the world and the coming of the Kingdom before the Judgment Day, and that the generation to whom he preached would themselves witness all of this. But, in fact, many generations have come and gone, but none of this has come about.

## The Excellence of Muhammad's Prophethood over the Prophethood of Musa and Isa

How can these [Biblical] prophecies compare to the information given by the Qur'an on the subject of the Unseen? Take, for instance, the story of the hypocrites in *Surah al Tawbah*,<sup>3</sup> or take *Surah al Fath*,<sup>4</sup> or the opening verses of *Surah al Rum*:

Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close by. Yet, it is they who, despite their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years (30:2-4).

Consider, also, the following verse:

Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that, of a certainty, He will cause them to accede to power on earth (24:55).

And how do they compare to the Prophet's telling his companions that they would spread Islam throughout Sham (including modern Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey), and Persia, and Egypt? And that Muslims would overcome the Persian and Byzantine empires? The Prophet, upon him be peace, even gave the name of the Persian emperor who would be defeated. This was related by Adi ibn Hatim in a hadith narrated by al Bukhari.

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2. I.e., they await the fulfillment of the prophecy.

3. See the author's commentary on the Qur'an at (9:118).

4 See the commentaries on this surah for the story of how it was revealed to the Prophet, upon him be peace, that his truce at Hudaibiyah opened the doors to the subsequent triumph of Islam.

Generally speaking, then, this is what may be said concerning one of the two major aspects of prophethood, or the giving of information about what is to happen in the future. The information given by the prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace, was certainly clearer, less ambiguous, and more difficult to deny than anything reported by the Biblical prophets. Add to this, Muhammad's information regarding events in the past.

The second major aspect of prophethood, the more important and significant aspect, or religious beliefs and practices, may be seen from two perspectives: that its contents be beyond the ability or reason or knowledge of anyone, so that it is clearly the product of revelation; and that its contents, guidance for people and reform of their religion and society, be beyond the knowledge and experience of its recipient, so that it is evident that it is divine revelation.

Those who are familiar with the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace, know that he grew up unlettered, unable to read or write; and that the people he grew up among were unlettered pagans who were ignorant of the religion and history of other nations. Even in Makkah, the center of their religion, culture, and trade, and the place where the tribal leaders resided, there was not a single school, or even a book. Therefore, the religion he brought, with its comprehensive code of justice, could not possibly have been something he developed on his own. I shall discuss this point, and refute the objections to it, in the next chapter.

In contrast, Musa was one of the greatest prophets in terms of his knowledge and righteousness, and in terms of the guidance and the law that he brought. Yet, he grew up in the home of a powerful king, in the most powerful society on earth, with the most advanced legal code, and the most highly developed philosophy, art, and industry. This was the home of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Musa saw his people oppressed and enslaved by that kingdom until they came to the brink of extinction. But those who deny revelation say that the code brought by Musa to his people was not a difficult task for an intelligent person raised in the King's house and its atmosphere of wisdom and judgment.

Then, at the beginning of this (the twentieth) century, evidence was uncovered which shows that the injunctions of the Torah corre-

spond closely to the legal code of Hammurabi, the Chaldean who lived before Musa in the time of Ibrahim (Abraham). The German scholars who uncovered Hammurabi's code from excavations in Iraq say that the law of Musa was clearly derived from that earlier code, and was therefore not the result of divine revelation.<sup>5</sup> The most these free-thinkers would admit was that if the Torah was not derived from that Code, then it is no more deserving of being called revelation than the code of Hammurabi; and Hammurabi never claimed that his code was revelation from God.

The reader will notice that all of the prophets in the Old Testament followed the Torah, and studied it in special schools. Thus, it would be less than correct to compare any one of them to the Prophet Muhammad. Even Yahya who, according to Isa, was greater than all of the Old Testament prophets, never brought a revealed code or news of the unseen. Even Isa, upon him be peace, considered the greatest and most influential of all the Biblical prophets, never brought a new legal code. Rather, Isa followed the law of Musa, with very few exceptions, though he attempted to reform the spirit of that law and the literalist tendencies of the Jews who interpreted it. Thus, it is for those who deny revelation to say: It should not be difficult for a man as intelligent as he was, one who had grown up in the Jewish legal tradition, in Roman civil society with its undertones of Greek philosophy, a man with true spiritual inclinations, to suggest the types of reform that he did.<sup>6</sup> Yet, we Muslims say neither this nor that. Rather, these are things spoken of by materialists, disbelievers, and rationalists; and thousands of them call themselves Christians of one sort or another.

The second perspective from which religious beliefs may be looked at is that the beliefs of Islam, like *tawhid*, are more progressive than anything in the Torah, and the books of the Old and the New Testament. Rather, these beliefs represent the perfection of

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5. I have explained this issue in the sixth volume of al Manar. Its summary was mentioned in my commentary on verse 30 of Chapter Nine. See vol. X, p. 348 of the 1321 AH edition of al Manar.

6. Many, however, trace all such reform to Confucius, the Chinese reformer, or to other philosophers who came before Jesus.

religious reform. This is even admitted by the Western scholars. I have explained this from both perspectives, ours and theirs, at different places in my commentary, *al Manar*.<sup>7</sup>

If you look at the stories of Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim, Lut (Lot), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qub (Jacob), and Joseph in the Book of Genesis, or at the biographies of Musa, Daud (David), Sulayman (Solomon), and the other Old Testament prophets, and then compare them to the stories of the prophets in the Qur'an, you will see a great difference. In the Old Testament, you will see God described in ways that are clearly unbefitting, like ignorance, remorse over having created human-kind, and vengeance. The prophets, too, are characterized in totally unbefitting manners, as if they were examples of the worst sort of behavior. In the Qur'an one reads of Allah's mercy, wisdom, justice, excellence, and established ways, and of the perfection of the prophets and their righteous doings, as examples of the best in human behavior. So the stories in the Old and New Testaments resemble a garden in which there are many trees, bushes, undergrowth, thorns, fruits, flowers, and insects. But their stories in the Qur'an resemble the fragrant oils extracted from those flowers, so that one is led to envision an entirely different garden in which all the beauty of the universe is gathered.

I will not mention here the writings of European critics, among the briefest and strangest of whom is a book entitled, *Detriments in Teaching the Old and New Testaments*, by an English author<sup>8</sup> who seeks to contradict knowledge, reason, and history. Certainly, the Qur'an is free of all that.

## The Church and its Demonization of Islam

The Church was unable to find ways of discouraging its followers from Islam after they witnessed how Islam had done away with paganism and Magianism, and had nearly done away with Christianity in the East, so that its light nearly overspread the West.

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7. See vol. X, p. 359.

8. This was Charles Watts. His book was translated into Arabic and published in Cairo in 1901.

Their only defense was to circulate tracts among the populace disparaging Islam, its Book, and its Prophet, and ridiculing it through obscene poetry and popular songs. All of which goes to prove that those churchmen were the most untruthful of all mankind, and the most malicious in their hatred of the truth and virtue. In their quest for temporal authority, it is certain that they would have caused the Prophet Isa, upon him be peace, to wash his hands of them.

Of course, the followers of these church leaders believed all that they said and wrote, and were swayed by their verse and song. Then, when they read the books of Muslims, and actually encountered and lived among them, it was only natural that they would react by exposing the disgraceful manner in which the church had misrepresented everything about Islam. Witness, for example, the book by Count de Castre, *Islam: Reflections and Experiences*, or the recently published (in French) *The Life of Muhammad* by d'Armougam. Both authors are French Catholics who admitted that their church had been a source of distortions and disinformation, and that Muslims had defended themselves with restraint.

Even though the Protestant Reformation and its widespread acceptance in northern Europe was due largely to ideas that originated with Islam, the Protestant clergy and missionaries continued to misrepresent Islam. Now they are worse than all others in terms of how they distort the truth about Islam and its teachings. Even so, those scholars who deal fairly with Islam are quite frank in what they have to say. This may, in part, have to do with the way their education and upbringing encourages them to think for themselves. It is quite likely that such educated people in the West will be the ones to spread the message of Islam in Europe, the United States, and then in the rest of the world. This was, in fact, suggested by Bernard Shaw, the Englishman whose *Married Life* has been quoted from recently by newspapers all over the Arab world.

## Signs and Miracles: Evidence of Prophethood

It remains for us to discuss the subject of miracles, upon which much of the Christian church is founded, despite denominational differences, and which Christians claim are missing from the mis-



sion of Muhammed, upon him be peace. Now, however, those same miracles have become evidence against the Church, rather than for it, and reasons for educated people to reject rather than accept its teachings. Had the Qur'an not mentioned the signs by means of which Allah supported the claims to prophethood made by Isa and Musa, free-thinking westerners might find it easier to accept Islam for the reasons that it appeals to reason, accords with human nature, encourages individual spiritual progress, and promotes the welfare of society. But the evidence cited by Islam of its divine origin consists of the Qur'an and the fact that Muhammad was unlettered. Clearly, this is evidence that can be supported by reason.

Generally speaking, miracles raise suspicions and have to be explained away either through interpretations or through doubts regarding their authenticity (in terms of how they were narrated). In fact, these sorts of things are widely reported in our own times as occurring at the hands of ascetics and yogis, so that these modern "miracles" would appear to be more numerous than all those in the Old and New Testaments put together. In any case, such occurrences only serve to drive educated people away from religion. I shall explain in some detail what Islam has to say on the subject.

## Miracles and Christ

The *Biblical Lexicon* defines miracle and its varieties as follows:

Miracle: An event which takes place through divine power by suspension of the usual laws of nature for the purpose of confirming the mission of the one at whose hand a miracle takes place. A true miracle is something that is above nature rather than in contravention to it, in the sense that it occurs through the suspension of natural laws rather than through their repeal. In fact, a miracle is the uncovering of an order higher than nature, and to which the natural order is subservient. An example of this is how, through exercising our will, we can raise our hands and, thereby, defy the laws of gravity. In the same way, Allah takes control of the powers of nature and directs them in their ways because they are the

tools of His will. Thus, the doing of miracles may only be attributed to Allah, or to those He allows to perform them.

So, if we believe in God as capable of all things, it will not be difficult for us to admit the possibility of miracles. The miracle was the creation of the universe, by His will, out of nothing. Likewise, Christ's being the third person of the trinity is a great miracle; moreover, the miracles he performed served only to verify that hypostasis. If we believe in Christ, the infallible Son of God, it will not be difficult for us to accept his miracles. Of course, the miracles of Satan are false.

Miracles are a necessity for the support of religion. Very often, Christ used his miracles to prove his spiritualism and that he was indeed the Christ. Often he would perform miracles in order to glorify God, or to benefit the bodies and souls of his followers. Moreover, he would perform these in public, before friends and enemies alike, and none of his enemies could deny them, except to say that they were the work of Satan. Finally, whether we question the authenticity of his miracles or their relevance to his divine mission, the fact remains that they were accepted as real by all those who were free of prejudice. So, if we do not accept their occurrence, we are forced to say that those who reported and believed them were liars, which is certainly not possible for anyone who believes in Christ and the apostles.

The power of miracles remained in the times of the apostles, but when Christianity began to spread far and wide, the need for miracles ended. At the present time we need only to believe in miracles if they take place within our own religious tradition and are attested to by sound internal evidence. Of course, it is within God's power to renew this phenomenon at any time He wants.

Following this entry, the author included a chart in which he listed the miracles of the Old Testament from the destruction of Sodom

and Gomorra to the salvation of Jonah in the whale's belly. Altogether, these totaled sixty-seven miracles. This was followed by another chart dealing the miracles during the lifetime of Christ (Isa), from his immaculate conception to his ascension. The number of those miracles was thirty-seven. These two charts were supplemented by a third which recorded the apostle's miracles, numbering twenty. The author also stated that there is no record of John the Baptist's (Yahya's) performing even a single miracle.

## The Miracles of Christ

Twenty-seven of the miracles attributed to Christ concerned his healing the sick or those possessed by devils. Three concerned his raising the dead. What remains are the miracles of his immaculate conception, his changing water to wine, his net in the sea of Galilee, his feeding of the multitudes (four thousand on one occasion and five on another), his walking on water, and his resurrection. We shall deal briefly here with the most important of these, his raising the dead, by mentioning the arguments of those who deny this miracle. The first cadaver belonged to a youth from the city of Nain whose mother was crying as the boy's funeral was taking place. Jesus stopped the procession and said, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." Then, "he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, 'That a great prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited his people.'"<sup>9</sup>

The second instance concerned a dead girl whose father said to Jesus, "My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live" .... And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, he said unto them: "Give place, for the maid is not dead but sleepeth," and they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Luke 7:11-16.

10. Matthew 9:18-24.

Now those who deny miracles object that neither of the youths, the boy or the maid, had actually died. They also point out that there are many instances of people rising from their funeral biers, even from their graves, after everyone had believed them to be dead. It is for this reason that civil governments prohibit burial before a certificate of death can be made out by a medical doctor who is scientifically convinced that death has occurred. Even literalists may be convinced that the girl was not dead, if they consider the words of Isa carefully, "...the maid is not dead but sleepeth." In other words, the girl had lost consciousness and it appeared to the people that she was dead, even though she was not.

The third instance concerned Lazarus, his friend and brother of his two companions, Martha and Mary (Maryam). When Lazarus fell ill in Bethany, his two sisters sent for Jesus, saying, "he whom thou lovest is sick." After waiting two days, Jesus set out and, upon arrival in Bethany, was informed that his friend had died four days before. Then Mary met him, and said, "If thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died." She then called her sister, Martha who, when she arrived, fell at Jesus' feet and said, "If thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died." At this time, they were lamenting at their brother's grave. But when Jesus saw her and those in mourning with her, his spirit was troubled, and went to the mouth of the cave in which Lazarus had been laid and which had been closed by a great stone. Jesus then ordered that the stone be removed. When the grave had been opened, Isa raised his eyes to the heavens and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." And when he thus had spoken he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with bedclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said unto them, "Loose him, and let him go."<sup>11</sup>

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11. John 11:1-44.

Now, what do the deniers of miracles have to say about this story, assuming that it is authentic? I once heard a Syrian doctor, a Protestant, say that the whole thing was a conspiracy between Isa and his friends that was hatched in order to convince the Jews of his prophethood! But far be it from the Prophet Isa, upon him be peace, to engage in deception of any kind! I only mention this as an example to show how modern Christians are unable to establish rational proofs of Christ's prophethood, much less his supposed divinity. For if this story (from the Gospel of John) proves anything, it may prove his prophethood, but at the same time it certainly negates his divinity. Obviously, that was the understanding of those who witnessed these events. But, then again, there is no direct or completely reliable chain of narrators to these stories. So, forget the objections of the deniers of miracles that this event took place as the result of a conspiracy, or by chance, or as the result of some natural aberration.

Then, if the greatest of these miracles, his raising the dead, is subject to this manner of interpretation, what of the others? Like his healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, or throwing out devils? Modern medical doctors say that possession by demons is really no more than nervous or psychological disorders for which treatment may be found. Similar explanations may be found for all the other miracles attributed to Isa.

## **Rational and Scientific Proof of the Prophethood of Muhammad**

The miracles related in the authentic narrations of the hadith scholars, natural miracles attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, are far greater in number than those related by the writers of the Gospels, and less susceptible to dismissal. Yet, in spite of all that, the Prophet never claimed that these proved the veracity of his mission, and he certainly never ordered that these be mentioned to people.

The reason for this was that Allah established the prophethood of Muhammad on scientific and rational principles. For, (by the time of his mission) humanity had entered that stage of maturity and independence in which men's minds are not given to submitting to the incredible or unnatural. To expect this would be to hamper their

intellectual progress. Thus, the proof of the Last Prophet's mission was in the revelation entrusted in him, or the inimitable Quranic text, with its guidance, wisdom, and knowledge of the unseen.<sup>12</sup>

The Prophet, upon him be peace, explained the difference between the limited sort of prophetic mission of the past and the universalistic mission which he had been entrusted: "All of the earlier prophets were granted signs the likes of which people could believe in. But what I was granted is revelation from Allah, and I hope that on the Judgment Day I will have more followers than any other prophet." This hadith was related by Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayrah.

Moreover, Allah tells us in the Qur'an that the idolaters urged the Prophet to perform miracles. So he silenced them by means of the Qur'an, its guidance, its wisdom, its inimitability, and its stories of the prophets and the scriptures of which neither Muhammad nor his people knew anything about.

Say: "If all mankind and all the jinn were to come together for the purpose of producing the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce its like even though they supported one another" (17:88).

The signs granted to Muhammad by the Almighty were not given to prove his prophethood and mission, but rather as a mercy to him and to his companions in their tribulations, as in their struggles against the aggressors with their superior numbers and arms. The Battle of Badr is a perfect example, and the Battle of Ahzab when the Jews conspired with the pagans and surrounded the city of Madinah. But Allah confounded them and they gained nothing but His wrath.

Among his miracles and signs were the healing of the sick, giving sight to the blind, feeding the multitudes from a tiny amount of

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12. The inimitability of the Qur'anic texts and contents is a matter to which I shall return later on in this volume. At present, I mention these things only by way of illustrating the differences between the prophet of Muhammad and the prophets who went before him, upon all of them be peace.

food during the battles of Ahzab and Tabuk. Another sign was Allah's sending a cloud during the Battle of Badr to quench the thirst of the Muslims and to soothe their burning feet in the desert sand while, at the same time, their pagan opponents received no such succor. At Tabuk, the Muslims' water supplies gave out in the desert so that they were forced to slaughter their camels and strain the water from their vital organs. So Abu Bakr said to the Prophet, "O Prophet of Allah! The Almighty has always answered your prayers with good, so pray for us!" At that, the Prophet, upon him be peace, raised his hands and prayed, continuing to hold his hands up until the skies opened and filled all of their vessels, but none of the enemy's, with its precious waters.

### **The Effects of Miracles on Individuals and Communities**

The signs produced by the prophets served as proofs against all those who denied them. Indeed, their refusal to believe in those signs became the reason for their deserving divine retribution in this life and the next. Thus, only those believed who were prepared to have faith. Pharaoh and his people, for example, were not prepared to believe in the signs brought by Musa; even the Israelites had trouble understanding them for, a short time later, in the desert of Sinai, they began worshipping the golden calf. Likewise, the Jews said of Isa that had he not himself been the chief of the satans he would not have been able to throw demons out of people who had been possessed by them.<sup>13</sup> They also said that Satan had performed greater deeds than Isa. Clearly, not many of them truly believed. Likewise, when the hypocrites saw the rain falling on the Muslim army while the Prophet prayed, they attributed it to the effects of the weather; not to his prayer. The majority of those who did believe in these miracles did so without any understanding of how they had come about. Any event for which

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13. 'This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils.'

a natural cause could not be found was understood to have been brought about by one empowered by the Almighty to do so, if not by one who was himself the Almighty. Indeed, the great majority of people showed the same sort of deference to magicians and sorcerers, and continue to do so until the present day.

It is furthermore reported that Isa said he would be followed by many false prophets and charlatans who would show great signs and wonders so that they mislead, if possible, even the chosen.<sup>14</sup> In the *Biblical Dictionary* several of these false prophets have been mentioned. My own comment on this matter is that the founder of the Qadiani sect which appeared some years ago in India may be numbered among these charlatans. Recently, the newspapers have mentioned the appearance in America of a Hindu who has performed what seem to be miracles. Isa himself is reported to have said, "Verily, I say unto you, a prophet is not without honor but in his own country."<sup>15</sup> This is why the true measure of a prophet's veracity is the influence his teachings have had on people, not the wonders or miracles they perform. He said, "You will know them by their fruits."<sup>16</sup> There came no prophet before him, and none after him whose fruits were more beneficial to humankind than the guidance brought by Muhammad, upon him be peace; and none who better fulfills the prophecy in the Gospel of John: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."<sup>17</sup>

No one who came after Isa, other than Muhammad, was able to guide people to the truth of religion, to God's unicity, to the law, to wisdom, or to character. Moreover, anyone familiar with history will concur that the pagans were far more influenced by things like signs and wonders than were the followers of revealed religion. And generally speaking, people have more reverence for saints and holy men rather than people than they have for true prophets.

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14. See Matthew 24:24.

15. Mark 6:4

16. Matthew 7:15-20

17. John 16:12-13



## **The Credibility of Muhammad's Prophethood and its Verification of the Prophethood of Others**

In summation, Muhammad's prophethood established its own credibility, by means of scientific evidence and incontrovertible rational proofs rather than by the sensational and astonishing. Moreover, these proofs are such that they will remain valid for all times. In fact, it is not possible to establish the credibility of the prophets who went before Muhammad except by giving credence to his prophethood and to the Qur'an which he brought with him. In these times of intellectual independence and progress, the Qur'an is the only reliable source of evidence for the earlier prophets and their stories. This is because there is no way to establish the authenticity of the earlier scriptures; both because no reliable originals exist and because the different translations are full of contradictions. I have discussed this matter at length elsewhere.

The only book of divine revelation which has been transmitted, letter for letter, by a multitude of narrators who had both written and memorized its texts is the Qur'an. Likewise, the only prophet whose life story has been preserved by means of uninterrupted chains of narrators is Muhammad, upon him be peace. Therefore, it logically follows that the only religion that can be understood by independent and rational minds is Islam.

Of the earlier religions, the most that can be accepted about them are their principles and teachings in general terms, those which have been so widely transmitted as to preclude doubt concerning their authenticity. In nearly each of the ancient civilizations there have been those who called people to the worship of God, the doing of good deeds, and the relinquishment of evil and corruption. Among them were prophets sent by God to deliver His message; and among them were philosophers and wise men who based their teachings on what they reasoned would benefit people. Even so, in all that is recorded of their various teachings, there are things which contradict reason and, apparently, the public welfare as well. Moreover, these also contain elements that were specifically related to historical and geographical circumstances, as well as incredible fables.

Finally, as Islam and its prophet represent the only religion for which a detailed historical record exists, I shall deal with a few of the doubts brought up by western materialists and their followers. To begin with, however, I will mention in a general way the regard in which they hold Islam. Thereafter, I shall deal with certain of their objections.

### **Orientalists' Studies of the Prophet's Biography and their Acknowledgement of its Veracity**

European orientalists have studied, by means of their own analytical and critical methodology, the history of the Arabs before and after Islam. They have closely followed the Prophet's biography and have read the Qur'an both in Arabic and its translations. Moreover, they are well versed in the Old and New Testaments and the history of religions, especially Judaism and Christianity. They are also well aware of the untruths and distortions circulated by prejudiced churchmen to discredit Islam, the Qur'an, and the Prophet, upon him be peace. These studies have led to the following results.

Muhammad was of sound character, completely rational, morally unrepachable, truthful, chaste, satisfied with little, and in no way greedy or ambitious. Nor did he concern himself with the things that his tribesmen prided themselves in, like public speaking or poetry. On the contrary, he despised his peoples' idolatry and pagan practices, and thoroughly disdained their attempting to outdo each other in satisfying their basest desires, including wine, gambling, and cheating others out of their money. In view of all this, in view of his life history and his certainty of his mission, western scholars have concluded that Muhammad, upon him be peace, was truthful in the claims he made after his fortieth year that he had been visited by the angel of revelation who recited the Qur'an to him and informed him that he had been chosen as a prophet to guide his people and all of mankind to the truth.

These scholars were further convinced of his veracity by the fact that the first one to believe his claims was the one most familiar with the details of his private life, or his wife Khadija, herself a respected figure for her intelligence and nobility of character. Moreover, his freedman, Zayd ibn Harithah preferred to remain in the Prophet's service rather than return to his father and family. Moreover, the people who first believed in him were among those who were widely known for the validity of their opinions and the judiciousness of their thought; in particular Abu Bakr and Umar are worthy of mention in this regard.

Those Europeans who believe in Allah and His angels, and who further believe that people have immortal souls, have also believed in the prophethood of Muhammad, upon him be peace, and their numbers are on the increase, so that the more there are who learn about Islam, the more there are who come to believe in it. The materialists, however, have had no recourse other than to explain this phenomenon in scientific terms that are acceptable to those who have no faith in the unseen.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Doubts Entertained by Those who Deny the Unseen as Described in Divine Revelation

The opinion of the materialists may be summarized as follows: Revelation was actually inspiration that welled up from inside the Prophet, upon him be peace, rather than from any outside source. It was through the effects and influence of his purified soul, his fervent worship, and his rejection of the practices of idolatry that he had visions and dreams, and that he began to believe that what happened to him was the result of divine guidance that was sent down to him directly from heaven, or by means of an angel. Eventually, these perceptions became so real to him that he supposed them to occur in his waking hours as well. Thus, everything the Prophet supposed to have been revealed to him, either directly or by means of an intermediary, seemed true to him.

The materialists further state that they have no doubt in the sincerity of Muhammad in regard to what he saw and what he said, but that the origin of these was from within him, and nothing came to him from the unseen, or from a realm beyond the natural and material world. Indeed, the materialists refuse to believe in the existence of such a realm, saying that they know of nothing that either establishes or refutes its existence. Rather, they explain unusual phenomena by means of what they know to be established facts. For example, the example they give of 'revelation' is that of Joan d'Arc, the French girl who was burned to death for her belief that God spoke to her. Finally, their dubious explanations concerning the nature of revelation have been accepted by many unsuspecting Muslims.

I shall begin my discourse in refutation of the materialist explanation of revelation by discussing the example of Joan d'Arc. In fact,

I received a question about her some time ago, and I published both the question and my answer in volume six of *al Manar* as follows:

## Doubts About Revelation

Respected Professor Rashid!

Certain doubts were brought to my attention concerning the occurrence of revelation, which is at the foundation of our religion, so I turned to the book of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, *Risalat al Tawhid*, and read the chapters on "Man's Need of Prophetic Mission" and "The Possibility of Revelation" in which I found the author's words to be both relevant and sensible. Even so, just because there is a need for something, it does not necessarily follow that that something will actually occur. Likewise, the fact that something is rationally possible, or not impossible, does not mean that it will actually happen. Moreover, the author's mentioning the wonderful achievements of the Prophet and the things he accomplished for his tribe, citing these as proof of the veracity of his mission, do not mean anything. It may be that a prophet is admired among his relatives, truthful in his call, in the sense that he is convinced of his own veracity, and a factor in the progress of his people; yet even all of that is not really sufficient as a reason to believe or have faith in him.

In the fifteenth century, when France was occupied by the English, a simple girl named Joan d'Arc who possessed both an impeccable character and the most honorable intentions, came to believe that God had chosen her to deliver her country from occupation by foreigners. Her life was far removed from the world of politics, but it was her belief that she heard God whispering these things to her, and people believed her, and followed her until she had assembled a small army of freedom fighters with which she managed to defeat the enemy.

Shortly after this victory the girl died the death of a hero when she fell into the hands of her enemies and they burned her alive. The name she left behind, however, is one that history will not easily forget, and she remains to this day a source of pride and encouragement for her people. For it was not long after her that the French

began to progress in every field of knowledge. Shall we therefore conclude that this girl was a prophet with a mission? You might object that her deeds were insignificant in comparison with those of the Biblical prophets. But allow me to ask whether or not there is a scale with which to measure these matters? Otherwise, how can we know what sort of deeds, and in what quantity, are required to take us to the point where we can know with certainty that the one who has performed them is indeed truthful in his or her claim to prophethood. After all, it is conceivable that chance circumstances might come together to make someone extremely successful and influential, when that person believed himself, owing to whatever sort of self delusion, to be a prophet with a mission. So what then? Should we believe his claims to prophethood?

Personally, I think that these factors should be considered evidence rather than binding proof. Even so, I expect that you will find something wrong with what I have outlined here and, if so, then I hope that you will be able to bring me to your point of view by further clarifying the matter for me. I know that my opinions are shared by certain Muslim groups, but they are too cautious to publicly admit it. Personally, I have no problem with asking questions; after all, no one can be right all of the time.

signed,

(One of your Readers)

## The Answer

It is a pleasure to know that the questioner has been able to deal so honestly with his doubts, without succumbing to them or transgressing the limits of faith to fall into the empty expanses of atheism and error. Rather, our reader followed his natural religious instincts by first attempting to find answers in books and then seeking the counsel of the learned. Many people turn away from the quest for truth at the first sign of difficulty, for they have grown accustomed to instant gratification and consider religion an impediment to their pleasures.

Evidently, our reader has read *Risalat al Tawhid* and understood its premises. He did not, however, consider carefully its objectives or results. Therefore, he appears to accept the premises rather than the results, ignoring the fact that the two are inextricably linked. Thus, were he to return to the chapter on "Man's Need of Prophetic Mission" and reconsider it, with faith in Allah and in the idea that Allah created the universe in accordance with judicious principles and a perfect system, I am confident that he will be satisfied. Moreover, I am convinced that he did not read the chapter in that book on "Revelation and Mission in Their Actuality," or that perhaps he read it, but not closely enough to follow it. Indeed, he failed to mention the argument given there and then base his objection upon it. Instead, his objection was based on one of the points there which constituted a premise related to the attributes of the prophets, upon them be peace. In what follows, I shall first explain the reader's objection and then show how it is defective. Thereafter, I shall return to explain my own opinion on the subject.

The reader mistook the mission of Joan d'Arc for a prophetic mission even though she never called her followers to religion or to beliefs that she claimed would ensure them eternal bliss. Nor did she perform any natural or scientific miracle by means of which she challenged others to believe in her. Rather, she was a good and noble girl whose religious and political sentiments led her to act. And when she did, her efforts were supported by the government and the people who, coincidentally, were just then ready to overthrow the yoke of humiliation under which they had lived for so long. Thus, the enthusiasm which she kindled led to a veritable attack on the enemy and his ultimate downfall. Moreover, the French are a people easily moved by such factors. Napoleon, for example, would lead his troops into certain death by reciting verses of poetry for them, much like his recitation for his troops when they first encountered the pyramids of Egypt.

I will also remind the questioner that he was mistaken in supposing the girl to be far removed from politics, for al Bustani's *Arabic Encyclopedia* says the following about this girl:

She was accustomed to working outside of her home, herding sheep and riding horses. The people of her village,

Domremy, were given to superstitions and had allied themselves with the party of Orleans in the partisan disputes which had torn France asunder. Joan had often participated in the political uprisings of her day. But it was her religious beliefs and active imagination which prodded her to ponder over the stories of the virgin and the popular legend which indicated that a virgin would come to save France from its enemies. At the age of thirteen, Joan began to speak of supernatural appearances and of celestial voices she heard and visions she had seen. A few years later she thought she had been called to save her country and restore the crown to the rightful monarch. Then the Burgundians attacked the town in which she had been born, and her suspicions were confirmed.

The *Encyclopedia* goes on to mention how she succeeded in convincing the Dauphin to give her command of troops, and how she led ten thousand of them against the English to break the blockade of Orleans within a period of a few weeks in the year 1429. But later, she lost her royal support. So, in the year 1430, she was defeated and wounded and taken prisoner.

Then, from a summary of the story it may be ascertained that the girl was motivated by nervous energy which came about as a result of her anxiety over the political situation and as a result of her sentimental religiosity and belief in the legends that were popular in her times. All of this is quite common, and is shared by all those who claim to be the awaited Messiah, like Mohammad Ahmad in the Sudan, or the Bab in Iran, or Ahmad the Qadiani in India.

Finally, there is no comparison between true prophethood and this sort of short-lived and localized occurrence in which there is no call to knowledge or to the reform of society, but merely a summons to participate in a fight to rid the country of an oppressor at a time of hardship. How can such a simple summons compare to the calls of the prophets which, as Imam Muhammad Abduh explained, represented a natural necessity in human society?

The nations which progressed by means of the teachings of revelation did so through the nature of those teachings and their influ-



ence. Moreover, the progress made by France did not come about through the teachings of Joan d'Arc. Rather, she was a military leader like any other who, through a combination of courage and determination and factors beyond her control, succeeded in overcoming a superior enemy, superior in numbers, learning, technology and wisdom. Of course, in such a case, the military commander knows nothing of the enemy's superiority, other than his superior numbers, and may never even realize it. In such a situation how can it possibly be stated that the commander brought about reform, or civilization? If the commander is accounted in any way a cause, then only in the sense that he acted as a natural agent, like a gust of wind that passes over the ocean and stirs up waves which, in turn, engulf the fleet and sink its ships, so that the enemies against whom they sailed may celebrate their deliverance.

What, then, of this girl who, like a bolt of lightning that illuminates the darkest night for a moment and then is gone, appears on the stage of history and then is gone? How can such a spark be compared with the light of the Muhammad revelation which not only enlightened a huge portion of humanity but which over a millennia later continues to enlighten and enrich. An unlettered man who spent his youth in peace, never claiming knowledge, or visions, or poetry, or eloquence. Then, at the age of forty, he calls out to the entire world: "You are in manifest error! So follow me, I will guide you to the straight path." And then he, the simple and unlettered one, reforms the religions of the world, their beliefs, their morals, and their laws, so that the world was turned topsy turvy and, through his teachings, entered a new stage of existence.

Certainly, the difference between the two is considerable. Rather than give a detailed explanation here of prophethood, I will simply request that the questioner consider the remainder of the chapter on prophethood in Shaykh Abduh's *Risalah*, as well as what I have written on the subject in my journal, *al Manar* and, in particular, a study entitled *al Ayat al Bayyinah* (Clear Signs of the Veracity of Prophethood). Thereafter, should the reader have any more doubts, he is welcome to come and discuss the matter with me face to face.

Anyway, no one who truly believes or understands can deny that the explanation provided by Shaykh Muhammad Abduh was

anything but satisfactory. Indeed, he explained that revelation and prophethood are rational essentials of Allah's knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, the mission and prophethood of Muhammad may be verified by means other than philosophy or rhetoric. This is what so astounded scholars from the West.

## **An Elaboration Of Doubts And Their Clarification**

The doubts presented generally by Montagne were elaborated upon by Emile d'Armougon in a way that no other westerner had ever attempted and, as a result, many Muslims have fallen victim to them. In this regard I recall a statement made by Jamal al Din Afghani to a group of Christians with whom he was engaged in debate. He said, "You have torn a patch a from the Old Testament and attempted to tailor it to Jesus Christ." In this instance, I might say, "You have torn a patch from the history of Islam, not from its sources, and attempted to tailor it to Muhammad.!"

I shall now explain these doubts in detail, beginning with their arguments, before refuting them one by one.

### *The First Argument: The Monk Buhayra*

The substance of this argument is that Muhammad met the monk Buhayra in the city of Basra in Syria, and that Buhayra was a Nestorian father who followed the strictly monotheistic teachings of Arius which denied the divinity of Christ and belief in the trinity, and that therefore Muhammad's teachings about pure monotheism had their origins with the monk Buhayra. It is also said that Buhayra was an astrologer, an astronomer, a mathematician, and a magician to whom God had appeared in order to inform him that he would guide the descendants of Ismail to Christianity. Some sources claim that Buhayra was not only Muhammad's teacher, but his companion in later years as well; and that the reason Muhammad prohibited wine was that he, in a drunken stupor, had killed his teacher, Buhayra. These are only a few of the outrageous and preposterous claims made in regard to Buhayra.

Now, what we Muslims know from the narrators of the *sirah* or the Prophet's biography is that when the Prophet went to Syria with his uncle, Abu Talib he was either nine or twelve years old, and the monk, Buhayra noticed him among the Quraysh because a cloud shaded him from the sun wherever he went. Buhayra then told Abu Talib that this was a sign that the boy would have a bright future, but that he would have to be wary of the Jews. There are several narrations to this effect, but all of them suffer from weakness in the chains of their narrators; with the exception of one narration related by Tirmidhi in which Buhayra's name is not mentioned. In any case, there is nothing in any of these narrations to suggest that Muhammad, upon him be peace, learned anything from Buhayra about his beliefs or his religion.

*The Second Argument: Waraqah ibn Nawfal*

This claim says that Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who was an Arab Christian and scholar, and a relative of Khadijah, the Prophet's wife, taught Muhammad about Christianity. Now, the authentic account of Waraqah was related by both Bukhari and Muslim who narrated that Khadijah took Muhammad, after he had informed of what had occurred to him at the cave of Hira, to see Waraqah. At the time, Waraqah was an old man who had gone blind, and very soon afterward he died. It is nowhere recorded that Muhammad ever met Waraqah other than that one time. The historians and scholars of hadith have carefully researched every authentic and unauthentic narration concerning Waraqah, but not a one of them mentioned that Waraqah ever called anyone to Christianity or wrote on the subject. Rather, what the narrators do record is that when Waraqah was told by Khadijah about what had transpired with Muhammad in the cave of Hira, he remarked: "Verily, then he is the awaited prophet about whom Isa the son of Maryam had prophesized."

In one narration it is recorded that Waraqah lived long enough to see Bilal tortured by certain of the idolators who insisted that he renounce Islam. But this narration is questionable for the reason that it contradicts the authentic hadith related by 'A'ishah that

Waraqah was blind when revelation to the Prophet began, and that not long afterwards he died. The torture of Bilal took place after the Prophet announced his mission and people began to accept Islam, which was about three years after the first revelation. Emile d'Armougan was mistaken in quoting the narration from the period of revelation, for those narrations are confusing and not all of them are authentic. Moreover, he seems to have had no idea of which narrations had been chosen for inclusion in the collections of authentic hadith. Anyway, the concern of the hadith scholars was to establish whether or not Waraqah was a Companion. So, if any of them found any information about Waraqah's knowing or teaching about Christianity or Judaism, other than what is mentioned in the hadith related by 'A'ishah, they would surely have narrated it.

*The Third Argument: The Supposed Widespread Influence of Christianity and Judaism in Arabia*

In order to make their point, they cite the widespread influence of Christianity and Judaism on the Arabian peninsula before Islam, and the fact that certain of the most eloquent speakers and poets, like Qiss ibn Sa'idah al Iyyadi and Umayyah ibn Abi al Salt had become Christians and popularized what they had heard from Christian scholars in regard to the prophecies of the Bible about the appearance of another prophet. I have collected several of the prophecies of the Bible and Torah in my commentary on verse 157 of the sixth *surah* of the Qur'an.

Nonetheless, it is nowhere established that the Prophet, upon him be peace, ever heard any of them. In fact, Qiss died before the Prophet's mission, though it is related that the Prophet did see him many years before, when Qiss was addressing the crowds from atop a red camel at the Ukkaz fair. In that address, Qiss is reported to have said, "Verily, Allah has a religion that is better than the one you follow at present, and He has a prophet whose time is nearly at hand. Then, good fortune will come to those who live to see his day, and then follow him! And woe on those who oppose him!"

This narration, however, is of dubious authenticity for a variety of technical reasons.

Now, Umayyah ibn al Salt was a famous poet from the tribe of Thaqif. According to Abu Ubayd, Umayyah was the best poet ever produced by Thaqif. Zubayr ibn Bakkar related that:

In pre-Islamic times, Umayyah ibn al Salt read the scriptures, wore religious vestments, and remembered Ibrahim, Ismail (Ishmael), and the ways of the Hanifiyah monotheists. He also refrained from strong drink and the worship of idols. Moreover, as Umayyah had read in those scriptures that a prophet would be sent to the people of the Hijaz, he had hopes that he might be the one. So when Muhammad received revelation, Umayyah was jealous of him, and refused to accept him. In fact, it was Umayyah who lamented the fallen idolators at the battle of Badr.

In the history entitled *al Mir'at*, Ibn Hisham relates that Umayyah had decided to follow the Prophet, and so decided to collect some money owed to him in Ta'if before migrating to Madinah. But, while he was on his way, he learned of the battle of Badr and the prominent Quraysh who had perished in the fighting, including two of his cousins. Then Umayyah turned back and returned to Ta'if, where he remained until he died.

It is authentically reported that the Prophet, upon him be peace, once requested Sharid ibn Amr to recite Umayyah's poetry. After doing so, Sharid remarked, "And he nearly became a Muslim."

In any case, Umayyah always considered himself a Hanif, and never became a Christian. Nor did he ever meet the Prophet, neither before nor after his mission began.

#### *The Fourth Argument: Salman Farsi's Acceptance of Islam*

Salman Farsi was an Iranian Zoroastrian who converted to Christianity at the hands of certain monks and then lived with different holy men from whom he learned that a prophet would soon appear. When he heard that the prophet spoken of by Isa would soon appear among the Arabs, Salman set out for Arabia and began living with the Jews in the city of Yathrib (later Madinah).

He did not, however, actually see the Prophet, upon him be peace, until after the *hijrah* when he converted to Islam. There are many conflicting versions of Salman's story.

#### *The Fifth Argument: The Summer and Winter Caravans*

They mention the winter caravans of the Quraysh to Yemen and the summer caravans to Syria, alleging that at both places the Quraysh often met with Christian monks and priests. Thus, they had many chances to hear of the coming of an Arabian Prophet.

#### *The Sixth Argument: Allegations of a Jewish and Christian Presence in Makkah*

D'Armougan claimed that there were Jews and Christians living in Makkah, though as slaves and servants, for the leaders of Quraysh did not allow these people to live as freemen in the holy sanctuary of their idols. Rather, some of them lived outside the city, in settlements at the edge of the desert. These people often related the stories of their prophets among themselves, though never before the leaders of Quraysh. Nonetheless, it is recorded that Abu Sufyan (of the Quraysh) once berated Umayyah ibn Abi al Salt for his repeated mention of the coming of an Arabian prophet.

These are the arguments mentioned by the Europeans in explanation of Muhammad's prophethood. Of course, what they meant to suggest from all this was that had he not heard the prophecies regarding an Arabian prophet, he never would have claimed to be a prophet. This is what the Europeans call critical analysis. Of course, they also present "supporting" evidence about his mental and physical states, and about his tribe and their mentality. In the following paragraphs, I will mention some of these.

#### *The Seventh Argument: Their Assumptions Concerning Muhammad's Illiteracy*

In reference to Abu Talib's adopting Muhammad after the death of his grandfather, d'Armougan said that Abu Talib was not a rich

man and therefore could not afford to educate the boy who, as a result, remained illiterate throughout his life. (Such an assumption would seem to indicate that the children of the wealthy Quraysh were sent to private schools, like the private schools in Europe. This, of course, is a completely baseless assumption.) D'Armougan then went on to say that, instead, Muhammad accompanied his uncle on his trading trips across the miles of empty desert waste. On these journeys, the impressionable youth saw the remains of ancient cities of Madyan and the Thamud, and listened to the stories told along the way by the imaginative bedouins. Thus, on one of his journeys to Syria he encountered the Buhayra the monk who saw in him the signs of prophethood as expounded in the scriptures. Then, in Syria, Muhammad learned of Byzantium, Christianity, the Bible, and the rivalry with Persia.

Now, the matters d'Armougan has mentioned here are no more than figments of his imagination that he dressed up with his fine French rhetoric. The truth regarding Buhayra the monk has already been dealt with above. In fact, Muhammad traveled with his uncle only as a small child, and he was returned to Makkah before the journey had ended. He returned to Syria one more time as a young man on a trading mission for Khadijah. Furthermore, the caravans to Syria did not pass through Madyan, which lies in the Sinai desert. Nor did they waste their time listening to bedouins tell tall tales, or to monks expounding Christian doctrine. So what made d'Armougan think that Muhammad would have concerned himself, while on a journey to Syria, with history, ancient cities, scriptures, and theology? And what could have made him believe that Muhammad would behave in the same manner as contemporary European political agents, meeting with every type of leader and milking them for information on every little thing.

Rather, the truth of the matter is that d'Armougan had no choice but to fabricate this explanation as there was no other way for him to account for how the stories of the prophets could have been told with such accuracy in the Qur'an. The same is true in regard in regard to its prophecies concerning the Persian defeat by the Byzantines.

*The Eighth Argument: Night Life in Pagan Makkah*

D'Armougan then went on to discuss how the favorite pursuits of the pagan Arabs, especially the Quraysh in Makkah, used to be, after business and war, the pursuit of pleasure through wine and women. According to d'Armougan, history shows that Muhammad witnessed but never participated in the debauchery; not because he was poor and unable to afford these pastimes, but because "the soul of Muhammad had a desire to watch, listen, and learn; as if his illiteracy had made him more attached than his friends to learning. Moreover, the greatness of his spirit so desired perfection that it naturally disdained the indulgences of his fellows."

Now, this too is another figment of d'Armougan's imagination. Muhammad never had any desire to witness the depravity and dissolution of his tribe, nor to hear of it, nor to learn anything about it. Thus, d'Armougan's apparent praise of Muhammad carries with it, in fact, two false accusations:

1. that Muhammad's fellow Quraysh were literate while he was not, and that his illiteracy was the reason for his (supposedly unnatural) curiosity about everything, and
2. that his spirit, as a result, inclined naturally toward enlightenment (knowledge of what lies behind all manner of natural phenomena).

The purpose of this seeming "praise" is to infer that the revelation which later came to Muhammad was in fact the result of these mental and emotional factors (and not true revelation).

*The Ninth Argument: The Deaths of Muhammad's Male Offspring*

D'Armougan then went on to mention the matter of Muhammad's sons, Qasim, Tayyib and Tahir, doubting if they ever existed, and noting that just because Muhammad was called Abul Qasim it does not necessarily follow that he actually had a son named Qasim. D'Armougan further stated that even if there had been male



offspring, they had all died in infancy. All of this, however, is conjecture on the part of Mr. d'Armougan. The fact is that Muhammad did have a son named Qasim; and Muhammad was indeed called Abul Qasim for that very reason; and Qasim died in his childhood. According to some of the histories, Qasim lived long enough to mount a camel. Then the Prophet had another son, Abd Allah. Now, the correct understanding is that Tayyib and Tahir were two nicknames given to the boy, Abd Allah, and not the names of two other sons. D'Armougan, however, attempted to make an issue of the death of Muhammad's sons and the effects these had on the Prophet. So, after d'Armougan claimed that Muhammad took Zayd ibn Harithah as his adopted son, because he was unable to bear the loss of his own sons, d'Armougan wrote:

It is the right of the historian to ascribe to this tragedy, or to the three tragedies which befell Muhammad in the deaths of his sons, effects on both his life and his thinking. This is particularly true if we consider that Muhammad was illiterate. Thus, if speculative argumentation had no power to turn him away from considering the wisdom conveyed by events, then personal tragedy, like the death of his sons, was even more likely to turn his thoughts inward. Moreover, each event caused him to ponder over his wife's worship at the temple of idols in Makkah where she would sacrifice to Hubal, Lat, Uzza, and Manat in order to relieve her soul of its suffering from the losses. Yet, none of her sacrifices or worship of the idols availed her in the least.

This being the situation, the matter of idol worship undoubtedly became suspect in the eyes of the pagan Arabs, especially when they were coming under increased influence by the Christians to the north, in Syria, to the south, in Yemen, and the west, in Africa.

Here, d'Armougan is attempting to use the deaths of the Prophet's sons as justification for his fantastic story about Khadija's seeking solace from the idols at Makkah. He then goes on to imagine that the shaking of her faith in idols, and her husband's, was due in part to the influence of Christianity in Makkah and other parts of

the Arab world. Finally, from these premises, he moves on to explain that the Prophet's revelation was a product of all of these factors.

The truth is that the only reason Muhammad, upon him be peace, adopted Zayd ibn al Harithah was that when Zayd's father and uncle appeared in Makkah in order to ransom him from slavery, Zayd told them he would rather be a slave to Muhammad than a free man.

Muhammad said to the father and uncle: "Call him and give him the choice. If he chooses you, he's yours without ransom."

Then he said to Zayd, "You know me and you know how I have treated you. Now you may choose for yourself."

Zayd replied, "Who am I to choose anyone over you? You are both a father and an uncle to me."

Then Zayd's father said, "What is this, Zayd? Are you choosing slavery over freedom? And in spite of your father, your uncle, and your family?"

Zayd replied, "I have witnessed things in this man that leave me no other choice."

Thereafter, the Prophet took Zayd with him to Makkah's public place and announced that Zayd was his adopted son who would be entitled to inherit him. At that, Zayd's father and uncle were pleased. And thereafter Zayd became known as Zayd ibn Muhammad . . . until Islam came. All of this was related by the historians Ibn Sa'd and Ibn Ishaq.

Moreover, Muhammad did not become distraught over the death of his son, or over the death anyone else. Rather, he was the most steadfast and self-possessed of all people. Likewise, Khadija did not despair of having more children when her son Qasim died. Nor did she ever make a sacrifice to an idol. In fact, Lat was a stone idol at Ta'if that was worshipped by the Thaqif tribe. It was never one of the idols worshipped by Quraysh. Uzza was a tree that grew out of a date palm and was worshipped by the tribes of Quraysh, Kinanah, and Ghatfan. Manat was worshipped by Hilal, Hudhayl, and Khuza'ah.

Furthermore, the alleged waning of paganism at that time, supposedly owing to the spread of Christianity, should have meant, in accordance with Mr. d'Armougan's logic, that Khadija

would not have turned to the idols for another child [but to Isa]. And, if her intelligence and breeding had not prevented her from acting in that manner, then what of her husband, the avowed enemy of all forms of idolatry? Would he not have stopped her? D'Armougan has himself declared that Muhammad had dedicated his entire life to the eradication of idols and idolatry. Yet, in his haste to make a point, Mr. d'Armougan appears to have forgotten much of what he had himself admitted about the person and character of Muhammad.

*The Tenth Argument: The Waning of Idolatry in Arabia  
and Muhammad's Spiritual Retreats*

D'Armougan also claimed that the spread of Christianity in Arabia brought about a peculiar mentality which led the Arabs to give serious consideration to a form of asceticism which in pre-Islamic times had been labeled *tahannuf* after the Prophet Ibrahim, the Hanif. Now, while there may certainly be a basis for this assumption, the fact is that here again d'Armougan has transgressed the limits of fact. He wrote:

In asceticism Muhammad found the solace his soul so truly longed for. Through it, he finally had the means of satisfying his desire for true knowledge of the universe. Every year, in the lunar month of Ramadan, he would thus retire to the cave at Hira on the slopes of the mountain called Abu Qays. There, he would make do with the scant provisions brought to him, pondering the universe and seeking revelation through worshipping the Creator far from the distractions brought on by people and the concerns of worldly life.

My reply to Mr. d'Armougan would be to point out that the hadith narrations indicate that solitude and quiet contemplation in the cave at Hira were things that Muhammad came to love only in the year that he was first visited by the angel of revelation. Moreover, he carried his own provisions; no one had to bring them to him. Ibn Ishaq's observation that Muhammad would spend every month of Ramadan at Hira refers to the practice he

began only after receiving the first revelation; never in the years or months before that time. Moreover, none of the historical or biographical narrations indicate that Muhammad went to the cave for the specific purpose of receiving revelation. Never was anything of the sort mentioned by any of his companions or those who knew him better than all others.

## The Conclusion of the Ten Arguments

Having spelled out his arguments, Mr. d'Armougan had at last arrived at the desired conclusion; and here he gave free rein to his French poetic imagination.

The night stars in the summer desert are so numerous and so bright that one can almost hear their twinkling in the sky, like the sound of burning coals.

Verily, in the skies there are signs for those who will ponder them! And the visible universe has an invisible side to it. In fact, the whole of it is invisible! Is it not enough for humans to open their eyes in order to be able to see it? Or to open their ears in order to be able to hear it? But most people possess eyes that can not truly see, and ears that do not really hear. Now, Muhammad, he thought he heard and saw. Does anyone need, in order to hear what is beyond the heavens, more than a pure and sincere heart?

Muhammad doubted conventional wisdom. And he wanted no more than to know the simple truth. Nor was he able to live with anything other than the truth. But the truth was not evident in his surroundings. The life of the Quraysh was not the truth; nor was the interest of the money lenders, the plunder of the bedouins, or the debauchery of the profligates. Nor was there any hint of truth in the idols that flanked the Ka`bah.

Where, then, was the truth to be found?

So Muhammad continued his retreats at the cave of Hira every year during the month of Ramadan. There, his desire to know the truth was so great that he literally forgot himself, neglecting to eat and to see to his worldly needs; all because what he saw of the world was other than the truth. Nor did he expect to find the truth in the stories of the Rabbis or the scriptures of the monks; but rather in the heart of nature, in the stars in the night sky, and in the burning sands of the desert, or the waves of the ocean, and in everything behind nature which is linked with existence and encompasses it. There Muhammad sought the highest truth, passing hour after hour in seclusion to be at one with the universe, and to peer beyond its veils to its innermost secrets.

D'Armougan then went on to say:

By the year 610, or thereabouts, Muhammad's psychological state had deteriorated to its lowest point. It weighed heavily on his mind that both he and his people seemed to have forgotten something very basic, and that people had begun to worship idols, each tribe having its own particular favorite. Moreover, the tribes were overly superstitious, fearing jinn, and ghosts, and all manner of supernatural phenomena. In other words, his people had forgotten the higher truths altogether, or else they had simply chosen to ignore them. In any case, from his soul, Muhammad rejected every unsubstantiated opinion, every phenomenon that submitted to a higher power, and everything that was not itself a manifestation of universal oneness.

Muhammad knew that the Christians in Syria and Makkah were in possession of revealed scriptures, and that others had claimed to have heard the word of God and to have learned the truth by means of prophets. So that every time people went astray, prophets were sent to them in order to lead them aright, and remind them of the

eternal truths. Moreover, the religion of which they were periodically reminded was in essence one religion. So whenever people corrupted it, a prophet would come and straighten things out again. Clearly, the Arab tribes in his time had wandered far from the path of truth. So Muhammad wondered to himself: When will their time come? When will someone be sent to set them aright, and lead them back to the truth?

Muhammad grew less willing to be among people. But in the solitude at the cave of Hira he found increasingly deep pleasures. Thus, he began to spend weeks at a time in the cave, with only minimal provisions for himself. By means of fasting and continued contemplation, distinctions of day and night, wakefulness and dream-state began to fall away. Thus he would sit motionless for hours, or lay in the sun, or stroll across the sands of the desert, all the time hearing the sounds of the rocks calling to him and assuring him of their belief in his mission.

In this manner he spent an entire six months, until he began to fear for his sanity. Thus, he confided his apprehensions to Khadija who in turn assured him that he was a true and trustworthy person, and that the jinn had no power over him. Then, one day as he slept, an angel came to him and said, "Recite!"

Muhammad replied, "I am no reciter!"

And that was revelation, and the beginning of his prophetic mission. From then on he began his life of assured and powerful religiosity, a life that was to attract the attention of all; but a life, nonetheless, of sacrifice and sincerity to Allah, to the truth, and to humanity.

I, Rashid Rida, will point out here that all of the above, or most of it, is incorrect. Had any of these assumptions been correct, they would have been very obviously correct. The Muhammadan reve-

lation, however, is above all speculation. So how, then, could that Frenchman have known that Muhammad lost track of night and day? Or that he could not distinguish between a waking and a sleeping state? Or that he spent hour after hour sitting in a cave? Or that he spent six months in that state? No. Instead the Frenchman altered the facts in order to facilitate his arrival at the fantastic conclusion that Muhammad had lost his mind and taken leave of his senses, so that he literally lost himself in his own imagination; the most tangible result of which was his claim to have received revelation.

I shall begin my rebuttal of these claims by quoting the most authentic of all narratives on the subject of Muhammad's worship at the cave, beginning at the month of Ramadan that year, and not before; so that I may thereby refute the wild allegations proposed by the Frenchman, and then discredit the conclusions he jumped to. What follows, then, is the hadith related by Bukhari and Muslim on the subject of:

*How Revelation Began for the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace*

Bukhari opened this chapter and, in fact, his entire book, with his narration of the hadith: 'Verily, actions are but by intentions.' Thereafter, Bukhari said,

Abd Allah ibn Yusuf narrated to us, saying, Malik related to us, from Hisham ibn Urwah, from his father, from Aishah, Mother of the Faithful, who said: Harith ibn Hisham questioned the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, saying: "How does revelation come to you, O Prophet?" The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, replied: "Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell, and that is the worse for me. Then, when it separates itself from me, I have retained it in my memory. Sometimes, the angel takes the form of a man for me; and he speaks to me and I retain what he says." Aishah said: "Verily, I have seen him as the revelation descended upon him, on a day of extreme cold, yet when it separated itself from him his brow was dripping with sweat."

Yahya ibn Bukayr narrated to us, saying: Layth narrated to us from Uqayl from Ibn Shihab, from Urwah ibn Zubayr, from Aishah, Mother of the Faithful, who said, "The first revelation the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, began with was the true dream [that came to him] while he slept. Then, he never saw [something in] a dream but that it came to him with the clarity of a new day. Later on, solitude became dear to him, and he would retire to the cave of Hira where he would undertake devotions, worship, over the course of several nights before he would go home for provisions. Then he would return to Khadija and take provisions for a similar stay. Until the truth came to him while he was in the cave of Hira, for that was when the angel came to him, and said: 'Recite!' He replied, 'But I am not a reciter.' The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, explained, 'So he took hold of me, and embraced me until my strength left me. Then he released me and said: 'Recite!' So I said: 'I am not a reciter.' Again he embraced me, and squeezed until my strength went out of me. Then he let me go, and said, "Recite!' So I said, 'I am not a reciter!' Again he released me and said, 'Recite! In the name of your Lord who created; created man from a clot. Recite, and your Lord is the Most Bountiful.' Then the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, returned with it, his heart pounding, and went to Khadija bint Khuwaylid, and said: 'Wrap me up! Wrap me up!' So they wrapped him up until the awe had left him. Then he told Khadija the story of what had happened, saying: 'I was afraid for my life!' So Khadija said to him: 'O no! By Allah! Never will Allah humiliate you. For you maintain family ties, lend support to the infirm, give gain to the destitute, are generous to guests, and assist in the vicissitudes of fortune.'

"So Khadija took him to see Waraqah ibn Nawfal ibn Asad ibn Abd al Uzza, the son of Khadija's uncle who had become a Christian in the times of Jahiliyah and was able to write the Hebrew script and transcribe verses from the Gospel in



Hebrew at will. He was an old man and had lost his sight. Khadija said to him, 'O Son of my uncle! Listen to the son of your brother.' So Waraqah said to him, 'O son of my brother, what have you seen?' So the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, told him about what he had seen. Then Waraqah said to him, 'That was the same angel Allah sent to Musa! How I wish I were young again! I wish that I could be around when your tribe drives you out.' The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, said, 'Are they really going to drive me out?' He replied, 'Yes. No man ever came with what you have come with but that he is persecuted for it. If I live to see your day, I will certainly come to your assistance.' But it was not long before Waraqah died. Thereafter, the revelation broke off."

Ibn Shihab said, "Abu Salmah ibn Abd al Rahman informed me that Jabir ibn Abd Allah al Ansari said, 'While the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, was speaking of the period when the revelation had broken off, he said: 'While I was walking, I heard a sound in the sky, so I lifted my gaze, and there was the angel who had come to me at the cave of Hira, sitting on a throne between heaven and earth. I grew afraid of him, so I went back home and said, 'Wrap me up! Wrap me up!' Then Allah revealed: 'O you wrapped up! Get up and warn!' ...as far as the words: '...and impurity shun.' Thereafter, revelation became heated, and continued."

This is the version accepted by the scholars of hadith in regard to the beginnings of revelation. It is well-known that *Surah al Muzammil* was revealed in its entirety after only the first part of *Surah al Muddaththir* was revealed. Thereafter the rest of *Surah al Muddaththir* was revealed. Mujahid said that the first chapter to be revealed was *Surah Nun*. But this is incorrect. It was related on the authority of Ali that the first chapter to be revealed was *Surah al Fatihah*. This opinion was held by my shaykh in his explanation of how *al Fatihah* was the opening chapter of the entire Book. It is possible that the meaning was that *al Fatihah* was the first complete chapter to be revealed after revelation had begun.

## Our Refutation of their Portrayal of a "Personalized Revelation"

Most of the orientalist's premises were based on supposition or on fanciful claims, rather than established historical facts. Clearly, if the premise is false, the conclusion drawn must also be false. For example, they claimed that Muhammad, upon whom be peace, had heard from the Syrian Christians the news that the Persians had overcome the Byzantines. Their intention in making this claim was to give people the impression that the prophecy in the first few verses of *Surah al Rum* was derived from what Muhammad, upon whom be peace, had heard from the Syrian Christians. This however, is both historically and logically untenable.

History tells us that the Persian victory over the Byzantines took place in the year 610, which was fourteen years after Muhammad's last journey to Syria and at least a year before the beginning of revelation. History also tells us that the Byzantine empire was so weak at that time that no one expected it to regain the upper hand over Persia. Even the Makkans scoffed at the notion.

Reason tells us that Muhammad, given his high level of intelligence, would never have stated with certainty that the Byzantines would defeat the Persians after only few short years. He would never have based such an assertion on his own opinions or on anything so unproved as his own "inner revelation." The historical fact is that the Byzantine victory took place in 622, while the revelation with the prophecy (about that stunning victory) came to the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, in the year 614. This means that the prophecy was fulfilled seven or eight years after it was announced. Moreover, the word used in the Qur'anic verse to indicate "a few" is generally used to denote numbers between three and nine.

Secondly, had the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, learned anything of the sort from the Christians in Syria, his companions would undoubtedly have heard of it and then narrated it to their successors, like they narrated everything else they heard from, or about, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace.

Thirdly, if this had happened in the way the orientalist's claim, the pagan enemies of the Prophet would surely have been able to

discredit his claim that he had received revelation by pointing out that he had simply heard it from the Christians in Syria.

In the fourth place, the texts of the Qur'an state clearly that the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, knew nothing of the earlier prophets and their stories before revelation came to him. The orientalists, moreover, agree with us that Muhammad never lied about anyone, much less about Allah. Even Abu Jahl, his worst enemy, admitted to that. Moreover, everyone is agreed on the strength of his faith and his conviction that everything revealed to him was from Allah and absolutely the truth.

The evidence from the Qur'an is quite conclusive. Consider the following account of Musa in Midian and later.

And thou (Muhammad) wast not on the western side (of the Mount) when We expounded unto Musa the commandment, and thou wast not among those present; But We brought forth generations, and their lives dragged on for them. And thou wast not a dweller in Midian, reciting unto them Our revelations, but We kept sending (messengers to men), and thou wast not beside the Mount when We did call; but (the knowledge of it is) a mercy from thy Lord that thou mayest warn a folk unto whom no warner came before thee, that haply they may give heed. Otherwise, if disaster should afflict them because of that which their own hands have sent before (them), they might say: "Our Lord! Why sentest Thou no messenger unto us, that we might have followed Thy revelations and been of the believers?" But when there came unto them the Truth from Our presence, they said: "Why is he not given the like of what was given unto Musa?" Did they not disbelieve in that which was given unto Musa of old? They say: "Two magics that support each other; and they say: 'Lo! in both we are disbelievers.'" Say (unto them, O Muhammad): "Then bring a Scripture from the presence of Allah that giveth clearer guidance than these two (that) I may follow it, if ye are truthful." And if they answer thee not, then know that what they follow is their lusts. And who goeth farther astray than he who followeth his lust without

guidance from Allah. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk. And now verily We have caused the Word to reach them, that haply they may give heed. Those unto whom We gave the Scripture before it, they believe in it, and when it is recited unto them, they say: "We believe in it." Lo! it is the Truth from our Lord. Lo! even before it we were of those who surrender (unto Him). These will be given their reward twice over, because they are steadfast and repel evil with good, and spend of that wherewith We have provided them (28:44-54)

Or the verses concerning the Prophet Nuh:

And it was said: "O earth! Swallow thy water" and, "O sky! be cleared of clouds!" And the water was made to subside. And the commandment was fulfilled. And it (the ship) came to rest upon (the mount) al Judi and it was said: "A far removal for wrongdoing folk!" And Nuh cried unto his Lord and said: "My Lord! Lo! my son is of my household! Surely Thy promise is the Truth and Thou art the Most Just of Judges." He said: "O Nuh! Lo! he is not of thy household; lo! he is of evil conduct, so ask not of Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge. I admonish thee lest thou be among the ignorant." He said: "My Lord! Lo! in Thee do I seek refuge (from the sin) that I should ask of Thee that whereof I have no knowledge. Unless Thou forgive me and have mercy on me I shall be among the lost." It was said (unto him): "O Nuh! Go thou down (from the mountain) with peace from Us and blessings upon thee and some nations (that will spring) from those with thee. (There will be other) nations unto whom We shall give enjoyment a long while and then a painful doom from Us will overtake them." This is of the tidings of the Unseen which We inspire in thee (Muhammad). Thou thyself knewest it not, nor did thy folk (know it) before this. Then have patience. Lo! the sequel is for those who ward off (evil) (11:49).

Or the verses at the end of the story of Yusuf:

This is of the tidings of the Unseen which We inspire in thee (Muhammad). Thou wast not present with them when they fixed their plan and they were scheming (12:102).

Consider, also, that the Christians know nothing of the story of Zakariah and how he looked after Maryam (Mary):

This is of the tidings of things hidden. We reveal it unto thee (Mohammad). Thou wast not present with them when they threw their pens (to know) which of them should be the guardian of Maryam, nor wast thou present with them when they quarrelled (thereupon) (3:44).

And her Lord accepted her with full acceptance and vouchsafed to her a goodly growth; and made Zakariah her guardian. Whenever Zakariah went into the sanctuary where she was, he found that she had food. He said: "O Maryam! Whence cometh unto thee this (food)?" She answered: "It is from Allah. Allah giveth without stint to whom He will" (3:37).

Fifthly, there is nothing in the authentic hadith corpus to show that Muhammad, upon him be peace, ever wanted to be the prophet awaited by the Christian and Jewish scholars. The Qur'an states:

Thou hadst no hope that the Scripture would be inspired in thee; but it is a mercy from thy Lord, so never be a helper to the disbelievers (28:86).

Sixthly, the hadith concerning the beginning of revelation, authentically related by Bukhari and Muslim, clearly shows that Muhammad, upon him be peace, feared for his life when he saw the angel of revelation for the first time.

The seventh point that can be made here is that if prophethood was something that Muhammad wanted for himself, or expected,

and if his alleged mystical experiences in the cave of Hira prepared him for it, then in those early days Muhammad would surely have expressed something of his enthusiasm and desire to reform his tribe through a chapter or two of the most eloquent chapters of the Qur'an. Yet, Muhammad waited for another three years before he brought a single chapter or spoke out in any way to his family or friends. This period of silence, on its own, suffices to refute the orientalists' claims that the Muhammadan revelation came from within, and not from above.

Finally, the knowledge possessed by Muhammad, or that which he supposedly acquired from Buhayra or the other Christians in Syria, despite all the poetic flights of imagination by the orientalists, was far too limited to become the basis, or the source, of the Qur'anic revelation. The Qur'an is clearly more sublime, more comprehensive, and more perfect than anything the Christians or Jews, or their monks and rabbis, much less the Arab pagans, could possibly have known.

The Qur'an was revealed to confirm the scriptures revealed to the prophets, Musa, Isa, Daud, Sulayman, and the others. The Qur'an was, furthermore, revealed to safeguard these scriptures:

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it (5:48).

The Qur'an, moreover, clarified that while the People of the Book had been granted revelation, they had been granted only some of it:

Seest thou not those unto whom a portion of the Scripture hath been given (4:44).

Hast thou not seen those unto whom a portion of the Scripture hath been given (4:51).

What is more, the People of the Book forgot some of that revelation:

And because of their breaking their covenant, We have cursed them and made hard their hearts. They change words from their context and forget a part of that whereof they were admonished. Thou wilt not cease to discover treachery from all save a few of them. But bear with them and pardon them. Lo! Allah loveth the kindly. And with those who say: 'Lo! we are Christians,' We made a covenant, but they forgot a part of that whereof they were admonished (5:13-14).

And what is worse, some of their scholars even tampered with that revelation:

Have ye any hope that they will be true to you when a party of them used to listen to the Word of Allah, then used to change it, after they had understood it knowingly (2:75).

Some of those who are Jews change words from their context (4:46).

O Messenger! Let not them grieve thee who vie one with another in the race to disbelief, of such as say with their mouths: "We believe," but their hearts believe not, and of the Jews: listeners for the sake of falsehood, listeners on behalf of other folk who come not unto thee, changing words from their context (5:41).

How realistic, then, is it to suppose that a chance encounter with a monk, while on a trading caravan to Syria, could have resulted in the clarification of all of these issues?

## **The Suitability of Muhammad for Prophethood**

The truth in regard to the state of Muhammad from earliest days, and how the Almighty prepared him for his mission is that Muhammad was created with all the perfections of character required of one charged with the mission to deliver the final revela-

tion. Besides his intelligence, he had a natural aversion to the idolatry and debauchery that had become a part of Arabian society in his times. The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, had all the natural characteristics to reform society and purify its members, and to become the ultimate example of human perfection for humankind.

Muhammad spent the years of his young manhood, twenty-five in all, with his wife Khadija who spent the first ten years of their marriage in bearing and raising children, and the last fifteen years as a mature and loving partner. She died, at the age of sixty-five, as the most beloved of all people to the Prophet, upon him be peace.

Throughout his life, Muhammad was an example of moral and ethical behavior. In short, the Almighty completed the preparedness of Muhammad for his mission as the Last of the Prophets, so that, in essence, his preparedness was not something he acquired on his own, but rather it was granted to him by Allah. So, not only did Muhammad grow up unlettered, and thus beyond the influence of the People of the Book, but he also took no interest in the traditional pastimes of his people, particularly things like poetry, public speaking, elocution, declamation, and debate.

Muhammad's seclusion in the cave at Hira might undoubtedly be considered "acquisition," or at least strengthening his natural preparedness. He did not, however, intend it to be a step toward prophethood. Had that been the reason for undertaking the exercise, he would have supposed, as soon as he saw the angel of revelation, that he had attained his goal. Under those circumstances, he would certainly not have feared the angel. Rather, the real reason for his seeking the solitude of the cave was that he was disturbed by the condition of his tribe, and sought refuge with Allah and guidance, and a way out of the darkness for his people.

And thus have We inspired in thee (Muhammad) a Spirit of Our command. Thou knewest not what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of Our bondmen. And lo! thou verily dost guide unto a right path. The path of Allah, unto Whom belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Do not all things reach Allah at last? (42:52-53).



My teacher, Imam Muhammad Abduh wrote:

Under normal circumstances, a poor and unlettered orphan would be influenced by the environment of his earliest days, and throughout his youth; especially by what heard around him from his kith and kin—having no books to guide him, or teachers to instruct him, or supporters to assist him. Had these matters run their natural course, the boy might have grown up believing what they believed and accepting whatever they practiced; at least until he had matured and been able to consider for himself. At that point he may even turn and oppose them if the evidence shows him that they are in error. Indeed, in his times, there were a few who managed to do just that.

But, this is not the way it happened with Muhammad. Rather, from his earliest days he felt repulsed by idolatry. From the beginning, his beliefs were pure and his character refined. It is clear from the verse: “Did He not find you wandering, and lead you aright?” (93:7), that Muhammad had nothing to do with idolatry before he was guided to *tawhid*, and that he walked the path of righteousness even before his character was perfected. There is no reason to suppose otherwise. God forbid! The “wandering” alluded to in the verse refers to the confusion in the heart of the truly sincere who desire salvation for others, to find the way to guide those who are on the path of destruction, and to instruct all those who have gone astray. So Allah guided the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, to what his insight had led him to seek, by choosing him for His final mission, and the establishment of His Shari’ah.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# The Inimitability of the Qur'an

## The Order of its Subjects

If the belief system revealed in the Qur'an, including faith in Allah and His attributes, His angels, books, and prophets, the Last Day and retribution, the Hereafter and its abodes of reward and punishment were to be collected and ordered in three or four chapters, like any book of theology;

...and if the system of worship revealed in the Qur'an, including purity, *salah*, *zakah*, fasting, *haji*, *du'a*, *dhikr*, and all the rest were to be collected and ordered in chapters, like any book of *fiqh*;

...and if the system of character-building and wisdom revealed in the Qur'an, including its description and encouragement of virtue and moral behavior and its description and discouragement of vice and immoral behavior were to be collected and ordered in chapters, like any book of ethics;

...and if the system of law and legislation revealed in the Qur'an, including its personal, civil, financial, and penal laws were to be collected and ordered in chapters, like any book of law;

...and if the stories of the prophets revealed in the Qur'an, including their parables, wisdom, examples, and divine teachings were to be collected and ordered in chapters, like any book of history;

...if all of these things, and all of the higher purposes of the Qur'an intended by the Almighty for the reform of human beings and society were to be collected and put in the order of the books of the Old Testament, for example; or if these were classified and put in the order that books are usually ordered in, the Qur'an would lose thereby the greatest of its virtues and distinguishing traits, and that is that any part of it may be memorized and used in prayer, or as worship through recitation at any time and in any place, and the

one reciting it will be reminded of issues of faith, virtues, law, and spiritual verities. A chapter in any normal book will usually contain mention of a single subject, or a single aspect of a single subject. Thus, one who memorizes it, or recites it, will soon tire of it.

The chapters of the Qur'an, however, with their unique order of subjects, are such that often a single verse will treat several different topics, and contain several different shades of meaning. Thus, the Qur'an combines different topics in different chapters, some short, some long, and then repeats these topics, or parts of them, in different ways, by means of different rhetorical devices, on different occasions, and for different reasons. By these means, the Qur'an ensures that its verses remain as fresh and inviting to the reader as the first time he/she reads them.

## **The Revolution Brought about by the Qur'an**

The Qur'an is a book that was revealed to an unlettered man who grew up with a natural purity of self, possessed a sound mind, a virtuous soul, and a strong moral character; and who was, moreover, unaffected by any established religious tradition, or blind faith. The reason for this was that the one so chosen was to bring about a revolution, a major upheaval among the Arabs and the other peoples of the world, one that would sweep away the darkness of idolatry and ignorance. The purpose of this revolution was to liberate the human mind from servitude to those with the audacity to claim divinity for themselves, or to claim to represent the divine and carry out his or her will, thereby taking control of peoples' lives, bodies, and wealth. The revolution brought about by Muhammad, upon him be peace, was aimed at the emancipation of the human soul, and the restoration of human dignity, through proclaiming that there is no god but Allah, and that all of humankind are equal before Him.

Such a revolution can only come about on the basis of the Qur'anic principle which says that:

Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (13:11).

How are people to go about changing themselves? How do they change their beliefs, and their behavior, and the way that they are? Especially when these are the things they grew up with, and were taught by the customs of their society and its time-honored traditions?

In order to achieve such reform, is it enough that someone come along and give people a book of instructions? And then say to them: "People! You have lost your way, and you are terribly corrupt. Not only that, but you are leading others astray, and corrupting them too. So, do what this book tells you to do, and you will go right."

Or perhaps this reformer person should give them a book of civil law, the introduction to which says: "Implement the laws in this volume and your rights will be protected, your community will gain respect, and your nation will prosper."

But is any of that realistic? After all, the wisdom of the philosophers, like the scriptures of the prophets, have been around for a long time. But in the hands of corrupted and debauched people these have no value, for their teachings will be ignored. So, obviously, no, this is not a realistic expectation. Laws are for governments with the power and authority to back them up.

Then, how did Muhammad manage to win over the intransigent Arab tribes of his time? Especially when he had no power or real influence of his own? Clearly, the answer is that the revolution brought about by Muhammad was successful because of the influence the Qur'an had on the tribes of the Arabian peninsula. It is a simple fact that, on its own, an announcement, or a command, or a prohibition will not go very far in supporting the truth, or refuting what is false, or in encouraging people to do right and avoid wrong.

What needs to happen if truth and good are to take effect on people, so that their influence begins to show in what people do and the way that they live, is that their faith must become strong enough to rule their hearts, and overrule their desires and their fears, and their hopes and expectations. Now, this will not happen to an entire community of people unless the matter of faith is brought to them in the manner that the Qur'an was brought by Muhammad to his people.

So, in this way too, the Qur'an is inimitable, for it turned the hearts of young and old, and transformed character, customs, and established patterns of behavior. Thus, a part of the miracle of the Qur'an was its agency in changing human society.

## **Comparing the Influence of the Qur'an on the Arabs and the Influence of the Torah on Bani Israel**

Consider Bani Isra'il (Children of Israel) and the prophets sent to them. The miracles they witnessed at the hand of Musa, upon him be peace, in Egypt, and those they witnessed in the Sinai desert during their years of wandering, did little to change the influence of the paganism and tyranny they had experienced during their years of captivity in Egypt under the Pharaohs. Indeed, the Israelites themselves became the greatest of trials for Musa, for while he, upon him be peace, was receiving revelation from the Lord, his people were melting gold for an idol. It took forty years for the corrupt generation among them to die off and be replaced by a new one, by those who children at the time of the Exodus or who were born in the desert. Then, it was the new generation that became capable of accepting the teachings of revelation and the revealed law, so that they put these into practice and strove hard to do so.

How do Bani Isra'il compare with the companions of Muhammad, upon him be peace? How do they stock up against those who heard the call of the Qur'an and paid heed to it? What about the depth of their faith and their patience in the face of the oppression and torture they were subjected to by the idolators? What of their struggle, and what of their successes? For the mission of the Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace, lasted about twenty years in all; or half the time the Israelites spent in the desert. And the first half of the Muhammad Mission was spent in calling individual idolators in Makkah to Islam. It was during the second half of that mission that the great revolution was brought about; in legislation, implementation, jihad, victory, and the establishment of a new order. Then consider what happened in the fifty years that followed; how the empires of Byzantium and Persia fell away and were replaced by the truth and justice brought about by *tawhid*.

Consider the disparaging terms used in the Bible to describe the Bani Isra'il, and then consider the following verse from the Qur'an:

Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves. Thou (O Muhammad) seest them bowing and falling prostrate (in worship), seeking bounty from Allah and (His) acceptance (48:29).

Undoubtedly, the reason for the transformation which took place was the Qur'an and its inimitable style. Indeed, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, employed the Qur'an as a means of jihad against paganism:

Hence, do not defer to the disbelievers, but strive hard against them by means of this [Qur'an], with utmost striving (25:52).

Thus, by means of the Qur'an's guidance, and the Prophet's example, an entire community of believers was created.

It was by the mercy of Allah that thou wast lenient with them (O Muhammad), for if thou hadst been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from round about thee. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs (3:159).

Thus, very few people who read the Qur'an were not moved by it to the point where they embraced Islam.

O mankind! There hath come unto you an exhortation from your Lord, a balm for that which is in the breasts, a guidance and a mercy for believers (10:57).

Now, had the Qur'an and its style been anything like other books, whether of law or philosophy or whatever, it would never have had the power to influence the Arabs in the ways that it did.

Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah. And if the People of the Scripture had believed it had been better for them. Some of them are believers; but most of them are evil-livers (3:110).

Moreover, the Arabs of those times knew nothing of government, or politics, or administration. All they knew was the Qur'an, and the example of the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace; and that was all they needed to know. Nor will they ever be able to reclaim their greatness except by means of the guidance given them by the Qur'an, and by renewing the revolution it brought to the world. And may the curse of Allah be upon all those who prevent them from this endeavor! Or those who suppose that they are no longer in need of practicing what it teaches, or of adhering to the Sunnah of the Prophet, upon him be peace.

The right which the Qur'an has over us, and of course there will never be another revelation, is that we must give it our studied consideration, and allow ourselves to be guided by it; and by all of it, not by just a single chapter. If Satan has succeeded at anything, it is his success in distracting the people of this ummah from purifying themselves and their society through the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

### *The Effect of the Qur'an on the Arabs*

Before Islam, there were instances of Arabs converting to Judaism and to Christianity. It was only natural, moreover, that these converts should call others to follow them down the same path. History records for us no instances of persecution of such converts, or even of their having to suffer insult or degradation. Rather, the leaders and of the Jewish and Christian communities were well respected by all, and their poets were as celebrated as the other Arab poets. In short, neither Judaism nor Christianity was considered by the pagan Arabs a threat to their way of life. But when Muhammad came and began reciting the Qur'an, it was as if an earthquake had shook Arabian society to its quick. The upheaval which followed was one that changed the face of the earth, trans-

formed hearts, modified the ways that people thought, and overturned the order of society.

The effect of the Qur'an on the Arabs was twofold: firstly, it overturned the pagan world, and secondly it purified the souls of the believers. I have explained previously that the Almighty had prepared the Arabs, and especially the tribe of Quraysh and those around it, by making them the closest of all people to the natural human condition, the most expressive of people owing to their language, and the most independent owing to their never having had been dominated by conquerors, or manipulated by religious charlatans. The rest of the civilized peoples of the world, on the other hand, had been subject to one sort of domination or the other for centuries.

Thus, when Muhammad, upon him be peace, was sent among them, they were uniquely prepared to listen to his call. But the tribe of Quraysh had its own interests to protect, especially as the custodians of the temple at Makkah, and so they looked upon the new religion as a threat to the honor they had inherited. It was for this reason that they directed all of their energies to opposing Muhammad and his call. When they failed to win him over through bribes, they resorted to force. Even so, the leaders of Quraysh knew very well that Muhammad's call was a truthful one.

We know well how their talk grieveth thee, though in truth they deny not thee (Muhammad) but evil-doers flout the revelations of Allah (6:33).

Thus, it was a situation where the Quraysh, out of pride, jealousy, and the desire to maintain their traditional position, opposed the message, even though they knew it was true.

And they denied the message, though their souls acknowledged it, for spite and arrogance. Then see the nature of the consequences for the wrong-doers (27:14).

Thus, the pagan Quraysh attempted to prohibit the Muslims from reciting the Qur'an. When they prevented Abu Bakr from



reciting the Qur'an and making *salah* in the Haram, the reason they gave was that he had become a distraction to their women and children. So Abu Bakr made a *masjid* in his own home, where women and children from all over the town gathered at night to hear him pray and recite the Qur'an. But again the leaders of Quraysh told him to stop.

Clearly, the reason for all of this was the effect of the Qur'an on those who heard it.

Those who disbelieve say: Heed not this Qur'an, and drown the hearing of it; haply ye may conquer (41:26).

It is related that the leaders of Quraysh consulted among themselves as to whom they might appoint to go and talk to Muhammad. Their choice in the matter was 'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah who went to the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, and attempted to reason with him, warning that if he persisted in his call, the matter might have to be settled by the sword. Again, 'Utbah attempted to bribe the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace. By way of reply, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, began reciting from the Qur'an until, when he reached the following verse:

But if they turn away, then say: I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt (which fell of old upon the tribes) of Aad and Thamud (41:13),

'Utbah stood up and put his hand over the Prophet's mouth, pleading with him to have mercy and stop! So, when 'Utbah returned to the leaders of Quraysh, they found him a changed man, and feared that he had succumbed to Muhammad. So 'Utbah related to them what had happened, and how he had been affected by the Qur'an. Part of what 'Utbah said to them follows:

All of you know that if Muhammad says something, you can be sure that what he says is the truth. Thus, (when he recited that verse) I grew fearful that some sort of disaster was about to befall you.

Another version of this conversation, includes the following:

He addressed me, by Allah, with words which my ears had never before heard, so that I hardly knew what I was saying.

All that Muhammad wanted from his tribe was that they allow him to deliver his message by reciting the Qur'an to people.

Say (O Muhammad): "What thing is of most weight in testimony?" Say: "Allah is witness between you and me. And this Qur'an hath been revealed to me, that I may warn therewith you and whomsoever it may reach" (6:19).

(Say): "I (Muhammad) am commanded only to serve the Lord of this land which He hath blessed, and unto Whom all things belong. And I am commanto be of those who surrender (unto Him), and to recite the Qur'an. And whoso goeth right, goeth right only for (the good of) his own soul; and as for him who goeth astray (unto him) say: 'Lo! I am only a warner.' And say: 'Praise be to Allah who will show you His portents so that ye shall know them. And thy Lord is not unaware of what ye do'" (27:91-93).

### *The Effect of the Qur'an on the Believers*

Everyone who embraced Islam in Makkah before the *hijrah* repeated whatever was revealed of the Qur'an, in order to perform *salah* by means of its recitation. Likewise, every one of the believers knew *salah*, as none of the other pillars had been revealed at that early date. Thus, they spent most of their nights in prayer and recitation of the Qur'an. Those passing by would hear the sounds of the believers reciting, and compare it to the buzzing of bees.

The spritual and social upheaval brought about by the Qur'an was the result of the believers' continued recitation of the Qur'an, and their exposure to its teachings. Indeed, they spent most of their waking hours, regardless of where they were or what they were doing, reciting the Qur'an.

Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and reclining (3:191).

The effect of the Qur'an on the believers was described in the Qur'an:

Allah hath (now) revealed the fairest of statements, a Scripture consistent, (wherein promises of reward are) paired (with threats of punishment), whereat doth creep the flesh of those who fear their Lord, so that their flesh and their hearts soften to Allah's reminder. Such is Allah's guidance, where with He guideth whom He will. And him whom Allah sendeth astray, for him there is no guide (39:23).

If We had caused this Qur'an to descend upon a mountain, thou (O Muhammad) verily wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of Allah. Such similitudes coin We for mankind that haply they may reflect (59:21).

## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Higher Purposes of the Qur'an

The higher purposes of the Qur'an include the reform of individuals, groups, and nations by elevating them to a stage of understanding, by emphasizing their common humanity and unity, by improving their minds, and by purifying their souls. Now some of these points require very little repeating in the Qur'an, while others require a great deal of repetition in order to be understood, and in order to sink in and replace the accumulated and negative effects of traditional and inherited attitudes. Like seeds, these points need to be planted deeply and then cared for if they are ever to sprout and grow and eventually yield fruit. Moreover, among these points are those which need to be explained all at once; and among them there are those which require gradual completion. Still other points are such that their existence is not possible except in the future, and therefore the most that can be done at the present is to prepare the way for them by establishing basic principles. Finally, some of the points included in the higher purposes of the Qur'an are of the sort that require no more than a passing reference.

The Qur'an is a book of practical training and education, not a book of education only. As such, it will not be satisfied with mentioning an issue a single time, and in a single passage, as is the way with most books. Allah Most High has alluded to this in the following passage:

All that is the heavens and all that is on earth extols the limitless glory of Allah, the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the Almighty, the Wise! He it is who has sent unto the unlettered people an apostle from among themselves, to recite unto them His signs, and to cause them to grow in purity, and to impart to them the Book (divine revelation) as well as wisdom - whereas before that they were clearly in error (62:1-2).

In explanation of the above, His "recited signs" are the verses of the Qur'an which guide to the laws He has established for the universe, His causing them to "grow in purity" is education by example, the "Book" is the scripture which took the unlettered Arabs to a state of literacy, and "wisdom" refers to the sort of beneficial knowledge which leads to righteous deeds or what is called philosophy in civilized society. Thus, all the purposes of the Qur'an, as well as the Sunnah's explanations and interpretations, revolve around these three major axes.

Here, I shall attempt to mention the fundamentals of these purposes. Moreover, I will do so in keeping with my earlier promise to the reader, when I stated that the message brought by Muhammad to mankind was more sublime and more complete than anything that came before him through the prophets and wisemen . . . and that this constituted proof that his message originated with Allah.

I shall furthermore divide these purposes into categories, and explain the wisdom of the Qur'an in relation to each one. Indeed, no explanation will be complete unless we deal with these purposes in a way that allows for an explanation of why humankind is in need of them, and how the Qur'an met these needs. This chapter will be an example of such an explanation.

## **Explaining the Truth of the Three Pillars of Religion as Taught by the Prophets**

The three fundamental pillars of religion which Allah sent His prophets to teach and upon which all felicity hinges are expounded in the following verse of the Qur'an:

Verily those who have attained to faith (in this Qur'an) as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the last day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Lord; and no fear shall they have and neither shall they (have reason to) grieve (2:62).

Obviously, the references in this verse are extremely brief, and the reason for this is to explain that the teachings of the Qur'an are more complete and perfect than any of those in the earlier religious traditions. Likewise, there is an intimation here that the Qur'an embodies the pure teachings of the prophets which, over time, had become distorted in the older traditions. So, if the prophethood and mission of Muhammad are accepted, as well as the Qur'an's divine origin, the believer will have to learn all about these pillars and act accordingly.

These three pillars are supported even by what we know of the earlier civilizations, like the ancient Egyptians and the Chaldeans, and by the scriptures of the Hindus, Magians, and Chinese. Our purpose here in this book is simply to explain to religious-minded people of all nations that what they follow today is not exactly what was originally revealed by God to the prophets who were sent to their ancestors. Rather, only in Islam is the truth preserved as it was originally revealed.

### *The First Pillar of Religion: Faith in Allah*

The first and greatest pillar of all is faith in Allah. All peoples and nations, however, have misunderstood this pillar. The Jews, for example, while they maintained their belief in God's oneness, allowed anthropomorphic notions to creep into that understanding when they failed to reconcile the divine attributes with the idea that there is nothing like unto Allah.<sup>1</sup> Thus, they placed God and man on the same level when they said that God sometimes tires or regrets having done something.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, they supposed that God sometimes appeared in human form.

At the time of Constantine, the Christians revived much of the old paganism by worshipping Christ as their Lord and God, and by worshipping the saints and their images, so that their churches

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1. And the Lord God said, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (Genesis 3:22).

2. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart (Genesis 6:6).

began to resemble nothing so much as the temples of pagan times. Indeed, their doctrines of trinity, resurrection, and atonement may be traced to Hindu origins, to the triumvirate of Lord Krishna, despite the best efforts of theologians to cloak all of this in cumbersome philosophical garments. Rather, the success of these beliefs was brought about by emperors who invested mountains of gold in systems which propagated and perpetuated these beliefs in ways that appealed to the emotions and the credence accorded by the unsophisticated to magic and mysticism. In this way, the earth became overspread by beliefs that clearly contradicted the notion of Allah's unicity.

The Qur'an came to destroy all remnants of paganism and idolatry, in whatever form, whether these lingered in the heart or in the mind. Nor did it expect to accomplish this by means of one or even a series of rational arguments that proved Allah's oneness. Rather, it recognized the need to answer the doubts generally held by people, in addition to detailing rational and scientific arguments, and addressing them in its inimitable rhetoric by means of examples. It is for this reason that the subject most often repeated in the Qur'an is the subject of *tawhid*. Again and again, the Qur'an speaks of how Allah is One in His divinity and is thus the only one worthy of worship. In the same vein, the Qur'an emphasizes how the entire universe is the creation of Allah and His subject. As such, none of His creation has the power to benefit or harm either themselves or anything or anyone else, except by means of the natural laws of cause and effect put in place by Allah. Moreover, the repeated mention of Allah's *rububiyah* or His single-handed creation, maintenance, and legislation of the universe seeks not so much to convince the atheists and pagans of Allah's lordship as to prove (to believers) the futility of calling upon and beseeching other than Allah; or of seeking His partiality by calling upon and seeking the intercession of the pious or saintly.

Indeed, the evil of association (*shirk*) has corrupted the beliefs of many Muslims and led them to give credence to all manner of conjecture and superstition, even if these openly contradict the established laws of nature as legislated by Allah. For the essence of *shirk* is one's turning to other than Allah when in need, rather than labor-

ing under the laws of cause and effect. The Qur'an repeatedly mentions *du'a* or supplication (as a means of accomplishing things) because it is the heart and soul of worship. Rather, *du'a* is the form of worship which most completely represents natural religion (*din al fitrah*). All other forms of worship have been prescribed by revelation. But, in essence, these are nurtured by *du'a*, and kept free of false practices.

There are some verses in the Qur'an which command that people supplicate Allah alone, while there are others which prohibit absolutely supplication of other than Allah. Still other verses demonstrate the futility of *shirk* and prove the validity of *tawhid*, often by giving examples which suitably illustrate these points. Then there are verses which illustrate the fruitlessness of calling upon any other than Allah, explaining that all other than Allah are his servants, the best of whom are the prophets and the angels; and then further explaining that the only one they call on is Allah, seeking his mercy and heeding his retribution. Obviously, however, this is not the place to elaborate on these points.

There are many other sorts of verses that deal with faith in Allah and His unicity, and that elevate the believers to various levels of knowing and adoring Allah, levels at which mention of Allah's names is accompanied by explanations of Allah's commandments concerning all manner of temporal concerns, like cleanliness, inheritance, and wealth. At the same time, these are further accompanied by mention of Allah's wisdom in creation, and the myriad ways in which He runs and orders the universe and its workings, including the nature and social patterns of humans. Consider, for example, these verses from the opening of *Surah al Hadid*:

All that is in the heavens and on earth extols Allah's limitless glory: for He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise! His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; He grants life and deals death; and He has the power to will anything. His is the First and the Last, and the Outward as well as the Inward: and He has full knowledge of everything (57:1-3).

Or these verses from the closing of *Surah al Hashr*:



Allah is He save whom there is no deity: the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One who determines what is true and false, the Almighty, the One who subdues wrong and restores right, the One to whom all greatness belongs! Utterly remote is Allah, in His limitless glory, from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity! He is Allah the Creator, the Maker who shapes all forms and appearances! His alone are the attributes of perfection. All that is in the heavens and on earth extols His limitless glory: for He alone is almighty, truly wise (59:22-24).

These names and attributes serve as wellsprings of spirituality in the heart of the believer, and as beacons of reason in the mind. Indeed, these are sources from which the righteous of this *ummah* have ever drawn their inspiration and wisdom.

Now this is the first objective behind the Qur'an's command to the believers to remember Allah as they stand, sit, or lie on their sides . . . so that Allah may become dominant in their lives. This was how the Qur'an described the prophet Yusuf, upon him be peace.

For, Allah always prevails in whatever be His purpose: but most people know it not (12:21).

Thus, the true believer will despise falsehood and evil; and his/her share in this world will consist of truth and good.

O you who have attained to faith! Remember Allah with unceasing remembrance, and extol His limitless glory from dawn to dusk. He it is who bestows His blessings on you, with His angels, so that He might take you out of the depths of darkness into the light. Indeed, a dispenser of grace is He unto the believers (33:41-43).

With the sort of repetition which Allah chose as the inimitable style of the Qur'an, He purified the Arab mind and heart of all traces of paganism, and thus allowed the finest and most noble

traits of character to flourish within them. The same was true of those peoples other than the Arabs who came to the faith, learned the language of its book, and then recited it with complete understanding. But then a time came when the Islamic peoples began to lose touch with the Arabic language, so that they recited the Qur'an without the ability to contemplate its meanings and teachings, relying instead on books of theology and creedal literature for their knowledge of beliefs, and on lifeless and uninspiring books of *fiqh* for their knowledge of practice. In this way the concept of *tawhid* became diluted and then contaminated with elements of lesser and greater *shirk*. And in this way, Muslims followed the ways of those who went before them, foot by foot and inch by inch, in terms of both their faith and their practice.<sup>3</sup> Then, those alleged to be knowledgeable set about interpreting the verses of the Qur'an on the subject of *tawhid* in ways that compromised its purity. And, for all of this, Allah took them to an accounting, the effects of which still lie heavily upon the *ummah*.

Certain scholars of theology interpreted the attributes of Allah in accordance with their own theories. Likewise, many of the Sufi masters went to extremes in interpreting the meaning of *tawhid*. In the process, Muslims became confused over issues like cause and effect, the oneness of existence, and predestination. But the earliest Sufis had used reason as their guide, and the purity of their hearts led to clarity in their thought. They had also relied on their knowledge of the classical Arabic language for the explanation of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and on the opinions of the Companions and their successors, the Sahabah and Tabi'in. But those first generations of Sufis were followed by those who knew little or nothing of the Qur'an, or of logic, or of experience. Their concern was with maintaining their positions as spiritual leaders and authorities, by interpreting Islam in ways that kept people satisfied. Had they understood the mean-

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3. Bukhari and Muslim related a hadith in which the Messenger of Allah, upon him be peace, said: "Verily, you will follow the ways of those who went before you, foot by foot and inch by inch; so that even if one of them were to crawl into a lizard's hole, you would follow." When the companions said to him, "You mean the Jews and the Christians?" the Messenger replied, 'Who else?'

ing of the shortest chapter in the Qur'an on the subject of *tawhid*, *Surah al Ikhlas* (the Chapter of Sincerity), they would never have allowed the concept of *tawhid* to be contaminated.

In fact, *tawhid* or the belief in the purest form of monotheism, represents the highest stage of knowledge to which humans have attained, either intellectually or spiritually. Many European scholars have admitted that the simplicity of the concept and its appeal to reason are the behind the appeal that Islam has had historically for peoples the world over, and why Islam has had little difficulty in replacing Christianity in so many locales throughout history.

The early Muslims' understanding of *tawhid*, their love of Allah, and their trust and faith in Him, were what purified their souls, raised their aspirations, and perfected their characters so that they could go out and conquer land after land, and establish the rule of justice after liberating the people from the intolerance of soothsayers, high priests, and monks, and from the tyranny and greed of kings. Thus, they were able to lay the foundations for a new civilizational order, and to revive the learning and art of the classical world. The well known social historian, Dr. Gustav Laboun has noted in his book, *The Development of Nations*, that facility in the arts can only come about in a developing nation if it passes through three stages, each represented by a different generation. The first generation will be imitators, with no true creative abilities of their own. The second generation will be a generation of transition, and the third generation will be independent and free to create. Professor Laboun, however, added that the Arabs marked an exception to this rule, for they passed into the third stage within the lifetime of a single generation.

My own observation is that the reason for this amazing progress was the Qur'an's emphasis in its teachings on the importance of using reason, and its condemnation of blind imitation. The Qur'an, moreover, urged Muslims to prepare themselves for roles of religious and temporal leadership in human society. When the *khilafah* passed from the hands of the Arabs, however, and the golden age of their civilization came to an end, all of this was lost. Ther, power passed into the hands of non-Arab Muslims and only the externals of the Qur'anic message remained.

*The Second Pillar of Religion: Belief in Judgment and the Hereafter*

Belief in the Last Day and what will occur at that time, including resurrection, judgment, and retribution for deeds is the second pillar of the religion revealed by Allah through his Messengers, upon all of them be peace. This belief completes the individual's faith in Allah and encourages him/her to do good deeds and avoid evil, indecency, injustice, and aggression. The majority of pagan Arabs, however, vehemently rejected this belief. The People of the Book, however, those who possessed scripture from earlier revelations which legislated both their civil and religious life (even those who had lost their original scriptures, and had them replaced by tampered versions), believed in life after death and judgment, even if they differed on the details.

This faith of theirs, however, resembled nothing so much as corruption, since it was based on innovations which effectively negated its reformative value among the people. Now the basis of this faith, whether as understood by the Hindus, or ancient pagans, or later Christians (after Constantine), was the presence of a savior who will redeem his followers from all punishment through his own atonement for their sins. This redeemer is the second person of the divine trinity which is itself the same as the third and the first persons, such that each of the three is the same as the others. Thus, everything claimed by the Christians about the atonement of Christ for the sins of humanity, and likewise their claims about his birth and his resurrection, all of these things are exactly the same as the claims made by the Hindus about Krishna. The only point they differ on is the name, was it Krishna or Isa?

As for the Jews, it would appear that the whole of their religion is focused on the people of Israel, and their claim to be the chosen people of God or, as they call Him, the God of Israel, as if He were their Lord alone, and not the Lord of All the Worlds! Indeed, their religion is closer to materialism than it is to anything of a spiritual nature. Thus, the corruption in this pillar of their religion is closely related to the corruption to be found in the other pillar, or the belief in, and knowledge of, Allah. So that this pillar, too, is in need of reform.

The Qur'an brought reform to humankind by reminding them of the teachings of the earlier prophets on the subject of retribution, teachings which upheld the dignity of humans by asserting that their ultimate destiny, whether eternal bliss or damnation, rested squarely upon their faith and deeds alone. In other words, judgment will be made on the basis of what the individual did with his own life, not on the intercession, atonement, or faith of another. Moreover, God's retribution for corruption and injustice on earth will be meted out in accordance with divine justice administered equally among all humans, and without special consideration for just one group of people. Moreover, retribution for faith and good deeds will be awarded in accordance with virtue. Thus, one good deed will earn a reward equivalent to ten good deeds . . . and Allah may grant increase whenever, and to whomever, He wills.

The Qur'an teaches that the reform it brought to humankind was no different from that brought by Ibrahim, upon him be peace, or by Musa, upon him be peace, both of whom are revered by Jews and Christians alike.

Or has he never yet been told of what was said in the revelations of Musa and Ibrahim, who to his trust was true? that no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden; and that naught shall be accounted unto man but what he is striving for; and that in time [the nature of] all his striving will be shown [to him in its true light] whereupon he shall be requited for it with the fullest requital (53:35-40).

In other words, it is a fundamental principle of all the revealed religions that no soul shall be accounted responsible for the sins of another, either through atonement or otherwise; and that people shall reap only as much as they sow. Thus, no one shall be requited for what someone else has done. Still, those deeds which influence the actions of others may be accounted doubly, or more; like deeds undertaken by one's offspring, or students, when one has spent years in bringing them up and teaching them right from wrong, or like one's setting a good example or precedent for others to emulate

or follow. In such cases, one will be granted a reward equal to the one granted to those who actually do the good deeds.

The comprehensive Qur'anic teaching on this subject is as follows:

Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God! To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this [self] to grow in purity, and truly lost is he who buries it [in darkness] (91:7-10).

Allah has created the human soul and endowed it with senses and reason, and with a nature and instincts of its own, so that it is capable of choosing between good and evil, and doing either right or wrong of its own volition. Allah granted it both a mind of its own and religion to assist it in deciding between good and evil. Then, in proportion to the degree of the soul's purity, and the influence of faith on its morals and character, it will either rise or fall in this world and in the next. Retribution is therefore a natural effect of the soul's and the body's doings. This is why Allah said:

Allah will requite them for their attributes (6:138).

Anyone who knows human nature, and understands the most basic religious wisdom, will agree with this simple truth. Yet, it took the Qur'an to come and rectify the ways in which it had been misinterpreted.

Having understood the way the pagan Arabs denied judgment and resurrection, and the ways in which the People of the Book, the Christians and the Jews distorted the original teachings of their prophets on these matters, you will undoubtedly have realized that belief in judgment and resurrection supplements the belief in Allah, and that one's remembering these matters will assist one in doing good and refraining from evil. You will also have realized that these beliefs would not have had the effect that they did on an entire people without the Qur'an's repetition of the teachings in regard to

them, and in increasingly eloquent fashion. Thus, at times, a teaching will be brought closer to the mind of the reader through rational proofs and evidence, while at other times those same teachings will be presented through metaphors and parables. As many as a hundred different verses may deal with a single subject. Yet, a sure sign of the Qur'an's inimitability is that the reader will never tire of going over it. In fact, the reader is barely aware that what he is reading has been repeated over and over again. Consider, if you will, the repetition of verses concerning resurrection and retribution in the lengthier chapters of the Qur'an. There you will find an amazing diversity of style and approach in dealing with these subjects.

One's faith in judgment, or the second pillar of faith in nearly every religion, necessarily follows one's faith in Allah or the first pillar. One of the clearest arguments to illustrate this relationship in the Qur'an comes at the end of the chapter, *al Mu'minin*, after resurrection and retribution are mentioned:

Or have you reckoned that We created you for sport? And that you will not be returned to Us? (23:115).

The same argument is used at the end of *al Qiyamah*:

Does man think that he is to be left to himself, to go about at will? (75:36).

Thus, one's rejection of the second pillar, or resurrection and retribution, means that one rejects Allah's wisdom and justice toward His creation. In addition, it means that one rejects Allah's beneficence toward creation, in that He fashioned humankind in the best possible way and then granted humans virtues and excellence that are unrivaled in creation. In fact, Allah placed the rest of creation at man's disposal. Such a rejection would furthermore mean that one has ignored the mental and intellectual powers bestowed on humans by Allah, and overlooked the fact that humans have been created in preparation for life and for knowledge without end.

Further ramifications of such rejection and deliberate ignorance are that humans accord themselves little value when they suppose

that there is no significance to their creation, and that their presence on earth is limited to a life of toil, struggle, wrongdoing and injustice. Yet certainly, if just retribution is not to take place here on earth, the retribution in the next world will be the greatest sign of Allah's justice.

Verily, on the Day of Judgment your wages will be completed (3:185).

Certainly, among the most effective styles repeated in the Qur'an is the dialogue in the Fire that takes place between leaders who went astray in the world and those who followed them, from among the satans of humanity, and the ways that each group attempts to disassociate itself from the other. Similarly effective are the verses that record how the people of the Fire call out to the people of the Garden.

### *Human Resurrection in Body and Spirit*

Among the points on which the Qur'an differs with Christian teachings is in regard to the belief that human resurrection and retribution will take place in both body and spirit. Thus, in the next world, humans will be as human as they were in this world. The difference, however, will be that those who developed themselves spiritually in this world will become more perfect in the next, while those who neglected their spirituality in this world will find their souls damaged and debased. It is now known that the ancient Egyptians and the people of many ancient civilizations believed that they would be resurrected both physically and spiritually. Many further supposed that their resurrection would take place in their original bodies. The Qur'an, however, explained that everyone and everything on earth is perishable, and that all will be destroyed on the Last Day. The theologians have further explained that physical resurrection will take place after the total destruction of earth.

We have indeed decreed that death will be ever present among you: but there is nothing to prevent us from chang-



ing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being in a manner as yet unknown to you. And since you are aware of the miracle of your coming into being in the first place—why, then, do you not remember? (56:60-63).

If resurrection were to be confined solely to the spirit, then that would mean that the noblest of God's creation, composed of both body and soul, is flawed. For humans are open to pleasures of the flesh and the spirit alike, and through these the infinite wisdom of the Divine is actuated, and the secrets of His creation are realized. By comparison, plants and animals are created without souls, while angels have no bodies. Yet certain philosophies, owing to their disdain of physical pleasures, which they term "animal," hold that resurrection will take place in the spirit only. In fact, worldly pleasures may be considered impediments only when they so occupy the mind and powers of a human being that he or she turns completely away from the life of knowledge, reason, and contemplation; or when these are affected adversely by worldly pursuits.

All of this may be attributed in the main to either excess or neglect. For example, the Hindu's disdain for the body, and their basing all spiritual progress on practices which deprive the body of its needs and subject it to what can only be termed torture. And Christian ascetics have adopted the same attitudes, and many of the same practices; in the same way that they adopted their beliefs about crucifixion, redemption, and the Trinity. Even so, they record that Isa drank wine with his disciples on the occasion of the Passover, and that he said to them: "From now on, I will not drink from the fruit of the vine; not until we drink together in my father's kingdom." (Matthew 26: 29). The Jews, however, went to the opposite extreme. The teachings of Islam, however, tread the path of moderation, giving people their due in every respect, yet requiring of them that they seek perfection in their humanity by developing their spiritual life to a point where it dominates the physical. In this way, the believer has the opportunity in this life to provide for the life of the hereafter.

It is evident from the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah that the spiritual forces in humans will become dominant (after death)

and be capable of assuming subtle forms, transversing great distances, and even communicating. Modern science and technology have certainly contributed to our easy acceptance of such matters; whereas only recently the secular materialists ridiculed all such notions, including the following verse:

The inhabitants of Paradise will call out to the inmates of the Fire: "Now we have found that what our Lord promised us has come true; have you, too, found that what your Lord promised you has come true?" They will answer, "Yes!" Whereupon from their midst a voice will loudly proclaim: "May the curse of Allah be upon the evildoers!" (7:44).

According to western scholars, they can now prove that the human soul is capable, after death, of assuming different forms, using natural materials, like the angels and the jinn. The Sufis of our own tradition have made similar claims. Anyway, I have dealt with this subject at length in my commentary on the Qur'an, entitled *al Manar*. The reason I mention these things here is in order to refute the claims of those who suppose the Qur'an to have borrowed from the scriptures of the Jews and Christians, and to have been, in the main, the product of Muhammad's imagination or self-inspiration.

It may furthermore be relevant to our discussion here if we mention that the Qur'an's prophecy of how the world will come to an end, as a prelude to the Day of Judgment, has no equal in the scriptures of the Christians and Jews. Nor is this a matter that Muhammad would have had any knowledge of. A "sudden calamity" (*qari'ah*)—evidently a meteor—will come from space and collide with earth, causing an immense explosion, and reducing the planet to a cloud of cosmic dust.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter, there will be a new level of existence, sometimes referred to as the "hereafter." Now, none of this ever occurred to the scholars of either science or religion; and it is therefore impossible to say that Muhammad heard it from some-

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4. See, for example, the following chapters of the Qur'an: 56, 81, 82, and 101.

one else, either in his home town or while abroad on a journey. Nor is it logical that he could have come to possess such knowledge by means of his own reasoning. Therefore, it is evident that it came from the Qur'an. And this, in turn, clearly refutes the claims of those who suppose revelation to be a matter of personal inspiration. Anyway, the latest thinking of modern astronomers is that this does represent the most likely scenario for the end of the world.

The verses which had the greatest effect on the Arabs to whom the Qur'an was first addressed were those which contained mention of the pleasures of the Garden and the torments of the Fire. These verses employed astonishingly powerful metaphors to convey their message. For example, in description of the Fire, the Qur'an speaks of it as a fire kindled by Allah which will rise over the hearts of the damned.<sup>5</sup> Then, in description of the Garden, one example of the language used by the Qur'an is to say that no soul may comprehend what joys to the eye are kept hidden from it.<sup>6</sup> In another verse, after mentioning the physical pleasures of the Garden, the Qur'an says: "But [to have] the pleasure of Allah is even greater!"<sup>7</sup>

### *The Third Pillar of Religion: Good Deeds*

The third pillar supporting the higher purposes of religion is that of good deeds. Indeed, these may be considered the logical results of faith in Allah, the Judgment Day, and Retribution in the Hereafter. In fact, faith and good deeds contribute to one another, so that perfection in either depends on the degree of perfection attained by the individual in the other. Thus, for example, if one's faith is deficient, one's deeds will certainly be deficient, so that they are performed as dissimulation, or hypocrisy, or as empty rit-

5. See Qur'an 104:6 where the gist of the metaphor is in the idea that the guilty hearts will themselves be the fuel from which the fire will be kindled, clearly alluding to the spiritual nature of that torment.

6. Qur'an 32:17. The Qur'anic commentator and translator, Muhammad Asad, explains that the expression "clearly alludes to the unknowable—and, therefore, only allegorically describable - quality of life in the hereafter." (trans.)

7. Qur'an 9:72.

ual. Thus, no deed will be acceptable to Allah, or of benefit to the one performing it, unless the deed is performed along the lines intended for it by Allah. This point is repeated over and over again in the Qur'an.

Were it not for the need to repeat this point, so as to remind humankind more effectively, *Surah al 'Asr* (103) might have sufficed on its own, and despite its brevity, to reform both the theory and the practice of doing good deeds. The same is true of *Surah al Ikhlas* (112) in regard to the Muslim creed. Indeed, both are so brief that they can be written on a single line, and thus represent prime examples of the inimitable style of the Qur'an. The same is true of *Surah al Zalzalah* (99) in regard to its teachings about the Hereafter, even though it may be written on two or three lines of a normal page. Imam Ahmad and al Tabarani related that Sa'sa'ah ibn Mu'awiyah went to the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, and recited the following verse from *Surah al Zalzalah*:

. . . And whosoever does even an atom's weight of good shall see [the result of] it; and whosoever does even an atom's weight of evil shall see [the result of] it (99:7-8).

Then Sa'sa'ah said, "Even if I never hear another verse, this one is sufficient for me."

It is also related that some bedouins heard the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, reciting this verse, and asked him: "O Prophet of Allah! Just an atom's weight?" The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, replied: "Yes." Then, as the bedouin muttered a crude phrase to show his amazement, the Messenger of God said, "Faith has just now entered the heart of the bedouin!" In another hadith, related by Imam Muslim, the Prophet, upon him be peace, is reported to have said, "Do not disdain even the smallest amount of good."

So consider how ready the Arabs were to accept the guidance of the Qur'an, and it reformed their inner and outer beings. When they accepted the belief that they would see the results of their deeds in the Hereafter, they went out and did as much good as they possibly could while, at the same time, quitting whatever bad

habits they had acquired. This is true *fiqh*, or understanding, of the religion of Islam.

In the hierarchy of requisites brought about by faith, good deeds stand at the top of the list. This is because if one is to know Allah, one must know that it is He alone who deserves praise, thanks, worship, and devotion. The other two corollaries of faith, one's fear of Allah's retribution and one's desire for Allah's rewards come after this pillar.

Among the deeds accounted "good" in this context are the prescribed forms of *'ibadah* (worship) and all of those forms of good that contribute to the reform and refinement of the individual and society. The following verses from Chapter 17 in the Qur'an are an excellent example of what I refer to here.

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them to attain old age with thee, say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word. And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: "My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little." Your Lord is best aware of what is in your minds. If ye are righteous, then lo! He was ever Forgiving unto those who turn (unto Him). Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and squander not (thy wealth) in wantonness. Lo! the squanderers were ever brothers of the devils, and the devil was ever an ingrate to his Lord. But if thou turn away from them, seeking mercy from thy Lord, for which thou hopest, then speak unto them a reasonable word. And let not thy hand be chained to thy neck nor open it with a complete opening, lest thou sit down rebuked, denuded. Lo! thy Lord enlargeth the provision for whom He will, and straiteneth (it for whom He will). Lo, He was ever Knower, Seer of His slaves. Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty, We shall provide for them and for you. Lo! the slaying of them is great sin. And come not near unto adultery. Lo! it is an abomination and an evil way. And slay not the life which Allah hath forbidden save with right.

Whoso is slain wrongfully, We have given power unto his heir, but let him not commit excess in slaying. Lo! he will be helped. Come not near the wealth of the orphan save with that which is better till he come to strength; and keep the covenant. Lo! of the covenant it will be asked. Fill the measure when ye measure, and weigh with a right balance; that is meet, and better in the end. (O man), follow not that whereof thou hast no knowledge. Lo! the hearing and the sight and the heart of each of these it will be asked. And walk not in the earth exultant. Lo! thou canst not rend the earth, nor canst thou stretch to the height of the hills. The evil of all that is hateful in the sight of thy Lord. This is (part) of that wisdom wherewith thy Lord hath inspired thee (O Muhammad). And set not up with Allah any other god, lest thou be cast into hell, reprov'd, abandoned (17:23-39)

Indeed, anyone will notice that these teachings are far more comprehensive than the Ten Commandments of the Bible. Consider, now the Verses of Advice in Chapter 6:

Say: "Come, I will recite unto you that which your Lord hath made a sacred duty for you: that ye ascribe no thing as partner unto Him and that ye do good to parents, and that ye slay not your children because of penury, We provide for you and for them, and that ye draw not nigh to lewd things whether open or concealed. And that ye slay not the life which Allah hath made sacred, save in the course of justice. This He hath commanded you, in order that ye may discern."

And approach not the wealth of the orphan save with that which is better; till he reach maturity. Give full measure and full weight, in justice. We task not any soul beyond its scope. And if ye give your word, do justice thereunto, even though it be (against) a kinsman; and fulfill the covenant of Allah. This He commandeth you that haply ye may remember (6:151-153).

## And the Verse of Righteousness in Chapter 2:

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the Prophets; and giveth his wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the God fearing (2:177).

There are many verses like these in the Qur'an, verses which exhort the believers to virtue and caution them about the perils of evildoing and vice.

### *The Way of the Qur'an in Perfecting Character and Reforming Behavior*

The Qur'an is a book of practical guidance, not a book of theoretical speculation. Rather, it is scripture which guides those who ponder its meanings to both the truth and the good, and to the way to purification of the soul by means of taking it to account for its actions. In this way only may truth and virtue prevail over their opposites, falsehood and evil. Moreover, you will find that these matters revolve around two natural poles, the understanding of which has nothing to do with the philosophy of Plato or Ibn Sina. These are one's efforts to free oneself of the tendency to follow desire, and one's efforts to fill oneself with the virtue of heeding, *taqwa*. Over thirty verses in the Qur'an repeat the censure of desire and its prohibition, explaining that desire prevents one from finding and following the truth. Another two hundred verses or more emphasize the importance of *taqwa* and praise those who have attained it. Here I shall mention only one verse as an example of each kind.

Hast thou seen him who maketh his desire his god, and Allah sendeth him astray purposely, and sealeth up his hearing and his heart, and setteth on his sight a covering? Then who will lead him after Allah (hath condemned him)? Will ye not then heed? (45:23).

Hast thou seen him who chooseth for his god his own lust? Wouldst thou then be guardian over him? (25:44).

### *The Way of the Qur'an in Guiding to 'Ibadah*

The Qur'an's method of leading people to good deeds is to explain the basis of those deeds and the points of their convergence, and then to repeat these matters in a general way. The form of *'ibadah* which the Qur'an most often recommends to believers is *salah*, the highest form of individual and congregational worship.

... and be constant in *salah*; for, behold, *salah* restrains from loathsome deeds and from all that runs counter to reason. and remembrance of God is indeed the greatest. And Allah knows all that you do (29:45.)

Lo! man was created anxious, Fretful when evil befalleth him. And, when good befalleth him, grudging; Save worshippers who are constant at their worship and in whose wealth there is a right acknowledged for the beggar and the destitute (70:19-25).

The Qur'an did not repeat that which could be remembered by repetition or by emulation of the Prophet of Allah's example, unless there was some special benefit in doing so. Thus, for example, the rules about fasting are mentioned in a single place in the Qur'an, while the details concerning the performance of *salah*, how many *rak'ahs*, when to make *sajdah*, how many times, how to calculate the *nisab* of *zakah*, and so many more are not mentioned at all. The reason for this is that there is nothing of spiritual benefit in mentioning these details, and nothing to feed one's faith.



*The Preponderance of the Virtues of the Qur'an  
over Those of the Gospels*

We Muslims believe that the Gospel revealed to the Prophet Isa, upon him be peace, was both guidance and light, as the Qur'an itself states. But we do not know what that book was, or what happened to it. Rather, we believe that it contained guidance for a certain limited time, and then lost its relevance. Allah completed His religion, and His message to humankind through the Qur'an, which is more perfect, comprehensive, relevant, authentic, and abiding.

Let us deal, by way of example, with two issues from the Gospels<sup>8</sup> which the Christians hold up as representative of the moral and spiritual superiority of Christianity over Islam.

The first of these is the teaching of Isa: Love thy neighbor, bless those that curse you, and do good to those who despise you; If someone strikes you on your cheek, offer them the other.

Obviously, the only people capable of following these teachings are the weak and enslaved. It is clearly a perversion to invite the strong to exploit the weak. Finally, it is the Christians themselves who are the best example of the absurdity of this teaching!

Teachings like this one have no place in a religion that recognizes human nature (*fitrah*), and that is for the simple reason that such a teaching is unnatural. The Qur'an tells us that: Allah does not burden any being with more than it is well able to bear (2:286). In regard to this subject, the Qur'an brings together factors of justice, virtue, and the common welfare.

But requiting evil may, too, become an evil; hence, whoever pardons [his enemies] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah; for He certainly does not love the doers of evil. Even so, as for those who defend themselves after having

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8. Of course, the reader will understand that the Gospel revealed to the Prophet Isa, upon him be peace, has disappeared altogether; and that the four Gospels in the New Testament of the Bible are at best approximations of that scripture. In any event, neither the Gospels themselves, nor their writers, claim to have been revealed to the Prophet Isa.

been wronged, no blame whatsoever attaches to them: blame attaches only to those who oppress others and behave corruptly on earth, offending against all right; for them there is a grievous suffering in store! But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives—this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon (42:40-43).

It should be obvious that forgiveness and pardon can only come from those capable of defending themselves. In this way they show their superiority over those whom they forgive.

Since good and evil cannot be equal, repel evil with something that is better—and lo! he between whom and yourself was enmity [may then become] as though he had always been a close and true friend! Yet, to achieve this is not given to any but those who are wont to be patient in adversity; it is not given to any but those endowed with the greatest good fortune(41:34-35).

See how the various degrees of justice and perfection are explained in these verses! See the appeal to reason! Is this sort of reform, coming as it does from the Last and Greatest of the Prophets, upon him be peace, not the best possible evidence that the Qur'an was revealed by Allah and that it is meant to complete all religion? I, for one, will testify to that.

The second example of these dubious Christian teachings is their portrayal of Isa, upon him be peace, as an ascetic who has shunned the world and its affairs. Thus, they have him say that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of heaven.

My response to this teaching and to the one before it is to point out that these teachings, if they have any authenticity at all, came about as limited responses to particular situations; in this case, to the preoccupation of the people of those times with wealth, to the extent that they allowed wealth to corrupt them morally. Such excess is often best treated with excess, but for a limited time.

Islam, however, is a religion for humankind in general, and therefore it addresses itself to all the affairs of humankind, religious as well as temporal. This is why Islam condemns the use of wealth in ways that are detrimental, whether it be wasteful spending, or tyranny, or fraud, or transgression of the rights of others, or penury in regard to spending on the needy and oppressed, or whatever. Likewise, the teachings of Islam are clear in regard to the use of wealth in ways that are beneficial, like taking it rightly and spending it rightly (for legitimate needs and activities), and spending it in the way of Allah so that it benefits all people, credits the community and strengthens it, or assists it in protecting its identity and liberty.

These teachings, then, may be viewed as exemplifying the ways in which Allah perfected religion for all of humankind. He did this through the revelation of His Book to the Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace. No unlettered person could possibly have been able, by means of his own reason, to bring such reform to the teachings of the earlier scriptures; scriptures held sacred by millions of people. Does it make more sense, then, to suppose that Muhammad was himself responsible for all this? Or that it was the revelation sent to him by Allah?

I will never forget the first words I heard in regard to the respective virtues of Christianity and Islam. You may suppose that I would have heard these words from one of my famous teachers, like Shaykh Husayn al Jisr, or Imam Muhammad Abduh. But no. Instead, these were words that I heard from one of the most respected Christians in Syria, Alexander Castiphiles who served as the Consul for both Russia and Germany when I was a boy. My father and I had gone to visit him in regard to a financial matter and, when in the course of our conversation he determined that my attitudes were enlightened, he turned the subject to matters of local and national significance. When he heard my criticism of certain of our Muslim countrymen, and of their outdated attitudes and backwardness, contrary to what Islam required of them, the Consul said to me that while the virtues of Islam were higher than the tallest mountains, the Muslims had themselves buried them; to the point where no one, including Muslims, seemed to know about

them. Then he said that Christians, on the other hand, had only a handful of religious teachings to work with. Yet they have managed to overspread the earth with that little handful.

To summarize, the three pillars of religion are common to all of the revealed religions; and this points clearly to the fact that they share a common source, or revelation and the teachings of the Prophets, upon all of whom be peace. It is furthermore quite evident that in many cases the original teachings became tainted, so that the need for reform was great; and that was why the Prophet Muhammad was sent to humankind with the Qur'an and its eternal message.

### **Explaining Prophethood, Mission, and the Functions of the Prophets**

The Arabs before Islam rejected all belief in revelation and prophethood, save a few among them who had converted to Judaism or Christianity, or those known as the *hunafa'*, who held to certain of the Ibrahmic teachings. The objection of the pagan Arabs to prophethood was that it meant that Allah had elevated certain humans over others, when it was their belief that all humans shared the same attributes. The objection of the Jews was a similar one, in that they believed that Allah would not consider all the peoples of the earth as deserving, or qualified for, such an elevated position as prophethood; but that He would choose His prophets only from among the chosen people or, in other words, from among the Jews themselves. As if the rest of humanity were unfit for such consideration from the Creator of the Universe! Even so, their scriptures were filled with descriptions of the prophets as liars, cheaters, and worse. Then the Christians came along and made the same sort of claims; that in addition to their Prophet, there were others among them who enjoyed the same sort of holiness; the apostles, for example, the popes, the saints of the church, and so on. And then the Christians began worshipping them as well! Moreover, both the Christian and the Jewish clergy appropriated to themselves the right to initiate legislation, and installed themselves as intermediaries between the average believer and God! All of this, of course,

amounts to denial of Allah's justice, generosity, and comprehensive mercy. But, with the mission of Muhammad, upon him be peace, all of that was exposed for what it truly is.

*The Sending of Prophetic Missions to Every Community*

Witness the following verses:

And verily We have raised in every nation a messenger, (proclaiming): Serve Allah and shun false gods. Then some of them (there were) whom Allah guided, and some of them (there were) upon whom error had just hold. Do but travel in the land and see the nature of the consequence for the deniers! (16:36).

and

Lo! We have sent thee with the Truth, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner; and there is not a nation but a warner hath passed among them (35:24).

Moreover, Allah favored humanity by reserving for Himself the right to initiate religious legislation. Thus, the Prophets of Allah were messengers who carried His word to their respective tribes, communities, or nations. If they were to be followed, it was only in the sense that obedience to them was in fact obedience to Allah through His revelation and His prophet. By means of the Qur'an and its teachings, humankind was liberated from the tyranny of priests and the priestly class.

Yet, owing to the continued corruption of humankind in this regard, the Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes its teachings that the prophets were humans like all other humans, with the only difference that they had been chosen to receive revelation and carry it to the public.

Say: I am only a mortal like you. My Lord inspireth in me that your God is only One God. And whoever hopeth for

the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work, and make none sharer of the worship due unto his Lord (18:110).

We send not the messengers save as bearers of good news and warners. Those who disbelieve contend with falsehood in order to refute the Truth thereby. And they take Our revelations and that wherewith they are threatened as a jest (18:56).

We send not the messengers save as bearers of good news and warners. Whoso believeth and doeth right, there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve (6:48).

Say: For myself I have no power to benefit, nor power to hurt, save that which Allah willeth. Had I knowledge of the Unseen, I should have abundance of wealth, and adversity would not touch me. I am but a warner, and a bearer of good tidings unto folk who believe (7:188).

In addition, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, clarified all of these matters through his deeds and words, and through his example in worship and humility before Allah.

## **The Perfection of Humans as Individuals, Groups, Communities, and Nations**

There was a time in human history when humankind knew nothing at all about religion, except to say that its teachings were illogical, and that human nature had to be goaded into accepting them, either through practices which entailed hardship and deprivation, or by force applied subtly or overtly. Then, if they accepted, they were numbered among those who had found salvation, and if they did not, they were lost, figuratively or otherwise. But, in truth, the people lost out in every case. Moreover, the wise and the learned among them were unable to deliver the people from the clutches of idolatry, cults, and ignorance.

But Allah sent His prophets to humankind, and in particular the Last of the Prophets, Muhammad, upon him be peace, who recited

the verses of Allah's Book to people, and taught them wisdom, and purified them, taking them from the darkness into the light of Islam. Muhammad, upon him be peace, explained that Islam was the religion of nature, of reason and thought, of knowledge and wisdom, of evidence and proof, of the inner being, and of freedom and independence. He further explained that no one, other than Allah, had any power over the mind and being of another human. Thus, Allah had sent prophets to instruct and guide people, and to give them good tidings and to warn them at the same time. In what follows, I shall deal briefly with each of these points.

*Islam is the Religion of Nature (Din al Fitrah)*

So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright—the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not (30:30).

Humans were created by the Almighty with a uniquely human nature which combines elements of the material animal with the spiritual angel. Thus, humans are naturally capable of knowing both the seen (material) and the unseen (spiritual) worlds. Moreover, they naturally acknowledge a superior power to which the entire universe is subject. It is only natural, therefore, that human beings feel the need to worship the Lord and Creator of the universe and all that it contains. It is this natural condition which prompts human beings to call on their Creator in times of hardship and need. The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, said: "Supplication is worship." In other words, it is included in the various forms of worship, because it is at the heart of all forms. In another hadith, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, said: "Supplication (*du'a*) is the heart of worship."<sup>9</sup>

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9. The first of these two hadiths was related by Bukhari (in his *al Adab al Mufrad*), Ahmad, and Ibn Abi Shaybah on the authority of Nu'man ibn Bashir. The second hadith was related by Tirmidhi on the authority of Anas.

*Islam is the Religion of Reason and Thought*

Read the *Dictionary of the Bible* and see if you find the word "reason" or anything that approximates it from among the names for this God-given faculty, and the characteristic which separates humankind from all other living beings. The likelihood is that you will not find it there. The reason for this is that the word is not mentioned in the Bible; not in the Old Testament and not in the New! Thus, reason has never been accorded a place in the religious life of the People of the Book. The same is true of thought and consideration and deliberation. In the Qur'an, however, the word for reason, *'aql*, is mentioned over fifty times. Words which approximate its meaning are mentioned another twenty times.

Lo! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men, and the water which Allah sendeth down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and (in) the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth: are signs (of Allah's sovereignty) for people can reason (2:164).

Say: Come, I will recite unto you that which your Lord hath made a sacred duty for you: that ye ascribe no thing as partner unto Him and that ye do good to parents, and that ye slay not your children because of penury—We provide for you and for them—and that ye draw not nigh to lewd things whether open or concealed. And that ye slay not the life which Allah hath made sacred, save in the course of justice. This He hath commanded you, in order that ye may discern (6:151).

Say: If Allah had so willed I should not have recited it to you nor would He have made it known to you. I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have ye then not reason? (10:16).



And they say: Had we been wont to listen or to reason, we would not have been among the dwellers in the flames (67:10).

Have they not traveled in the land, and have they hearts wherewith to feel and ears wherewith to hear? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind (22:46).

Anyone who reads these verses will immediately realize that the people who follow this religion are people who are capable of using their minds; and that those who do not (use their minds in matters of religion) are no better than cattle. For, other than blind faith, they have nothing on which to base their spiritual lives.

Say: I counsel you in one thing only: Be ever conscious of standing before Allah, whether you are in the company of others or alone. Then bethink yourselves. . . (34:46).

Have they not pondered upon themselves? Allah created not the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them, save with truth and for a destined end. But truly many of mankind are disbelievers in the meeting with their Lord (30:8).

Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and reclining, and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and say): "Our Lord! Thou createdst not this in vain. Glory be to Thee! Preserve us from the doom of Fire" (3:191).

Say: "Come, bring your witnesses who can bear witness that Allah forbade (all) this. And if they bear witness, do not thou bear witness with them. Follow thou not the whims of those who deny Our revelations, those who believe not in the Hereafter and deem (others) equal with their Lord" (6:150).

*Islam is the Religion of Knowledge and Wisdom*

The word for knowledge is mentioned over a hundred times in the Qur'an; and its corollaries are mentioned even more often. Knowledge, moreover, may refer to knowledge of both the world and the hereafter. For example, in the following verse of the Qur'an, knowledge is general in meaning:

And never concern yourself with anything of which you have no knowledge: verily, your hearing, sight, and heart—all of them—will be called to account for it (17:36),

where the intended meaning is that one should not seek what one can not have first hand knowledge of through the medium of one's sight, or through (hearing) the reliable narrations of others, or by means of conclusive arguments or evidence. Raghīb, in his commentary, mentions these three means of knowing and then explains that the verse comes in caution against groundless assertions and statements unsupported by evidence. Baydawi, in his commentary, cautions against, in addition to these, blind faith and deference to the opinions of others.

Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Have ye thought on all that ye invoke beside Allah? Show me what they have created of the earth. Or have they any Portion the heavens? Bring me a Scripture before this (Scripture), or some vestige of knowledge (in support of what ye say), if ye are truthful (46:4).

It is a promise of Allah. Allah faileth not His promise, but most of mankind know not. They know only some appearance of the life of the world, and are heedless of the Hereafter (30:6-7.)

And among mankind is he who disputeth concerning Allah without knowledge or guidance or a Scripture giving light (22:8).

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Lo! herein indeed are portents for men of knowledge (30:22). And of men and beasts and cattle, in like manner, divers hues? The erudite among His bondsmen fear Allah alone. Lo! Allah is Mighty, Forgiving (35:28).

Allah (Himself) is witness that there is no god save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise (3:18).

O ye who believe! When it is said, Make room! in assemblies, then make room; Allah will make way for you (hereafter). And when it is said, Come up higher! go up higher; Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks. Allah is informed of what ye do (58:11).

Then exalted be Allah, the True King! And hasten not (O Muhammad) with the Qur'an ere its revelation hath been perfected unto thee, and say: "My Lord! Increase me in knowledge" (20:114).

In support of the verses in praise of knowledge, there is an entire host of verses that denounce ignorance and those who do not use their minds freely.

Most of them follow naught but conjecture. Assuredly conjecture can by no means take the place of truth. Lo! Allah is Aware of what they do (10:36).

And they have no knowledge thereof. They follow but a guess, and lo! a guess can never take the place of the truth (53:28).

And because of their saying: "We slew the Messiah Isa son of Maryam, Allah's messenger," they slew him not nor cru-

cified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture ; they slew him not for certain (4:157).

Say: "My Lord forbiddeth only indecencies, such of them as are apparent and such as are within, and sin and wrongful oppression, and that ye associate with Allah that for which no warrant hath been revealed, and that ye tell concerning Allah that which ye know not" (7:33).

In regard to wisdom, the Qur'an is equally as forthcoming.

We have enjoined on man kindness to parents; but if they strive to make thee join with Me that of which thou hast no knowledge, then obey them not. Unto Me is your return and I shall tell you what ye used to do (29:8).

He giveth wisdom unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good. But none remember except men of understanding (2:269).

He it is Who hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom, though heretofore they were indeed in error manifest (62:2).

But for the grace of Allah upon thee (Muhammad), and His mercy, a party of them had resolved to mislead thee, but they will mislead only themselves and they will hurt thee not at all. Allah revealeth unto thee the Scripture and wisdom, and teacheth thee that which thou knewest not. The grace of Allah toward thee hath been infinite (4:113).

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord

is best aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright (16:125).

This is (part) of that wisdom wherewith thy Lord hath inspired thee (O Muhammad). And set not up with Allah any other god, lest thou be cast into hell, reprov'd, abandoned (17:39).

The Almighty granted wisdom to all of His prophets. But people forgot their teachings and reverted to their blind acceptance of those who elevated themselves to positions of religious leadership, some of whom, like Paul of the Christians, simply abrogated the teachings of the prophets. In regard to the Jews, Allah revealed:

Or are they jealous of mankind because of that which Allah of His bounty hath bestowed upon them? For We bestowed upon the house of Ibrahim (of old) the Scripture and Wisdom, and We bestowed on them a mighty kingdom (4:54).

Thus, scripture (the Book) is the greatest of Allah's gifts, while this is followed by wisdom, and then dominion. In regard to the Prophet Daud, the Qur'an states:

So they routed them by Allah's leave and Daud slew Goliath; and Allah gave him the kingdom and wisdom, and taught him of that which He willeth. And if Allah had not repelled some men by others the earth would have been corrupted. But Allah is a Lord of Kindness to (His) creatures (2:251)

To His prophet Isa, Allah said:

When Allah saith: "O Isa, son of Maryam! Remember My favor unto thee and unto thy mother; how I strengthened thee with the holy Spirit, so that thou spakest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught thee the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how thou didst shape of clay as it were the likeness of a

bird by My permission, and didst blow upon it and it was a bird by My permission, and thou didst heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission; and how thou didst raise the dead, by My permission and how I restrained the Children of Israel from (harming) thee when thou camest unto them with clear proofs, and those of them who disbelieved exclaimed: 'This is naught else than mere magic'" (5:110).

And verily We gave Luqman wisdom, saying: "Give thanks unto Allah; and whosoever giveth thanks, he giveth thanks for (the good of) his soul. And whosoever refuseth—Lo! Allah is Absolute, Owner of Praise" (31:12).

### *Islam is the Religion of Proof and Evidence*

Allah says:

He who crieth unto any other god along with Allah hath no proof thereof. His reckoning is only with his Lord. Lo! disbelievers will not be successful (23:117).

In the above verse, the warning against idolatry is predicated on there being no evidence of its validity, even though it is obviously invalid anyway. But, the point is that Allah sent His prophets to humankind to challenge them to bring evidence to show the validity of what they worshipped, and how they worshipped them.

And We shall take out from every nation a witness and We shall say: "Bring your proof." Then they will know that Allah hath the Truth, and all that they invented will have failed them (28:75)

### *The Qur'an Brings Rational Proofs to Bear against the Idea and Practice of Idolatry*

If there were therein Gods beside Allah, then verily both (the heavens and the earth) would have been disordered.

Glorified be Allah, the Lord of the Throne, from all that they ascribe (unto Him) (21:22).

Or have they chosen other gods beside Him? Say: "Bring your proof (of their godhead)." This is the Reminder of those with me and those before me, but most of them know not the Truth and so they are averse (21:24).

Is not He (best), Who produceth creation, then reproduceth it, and Who provideth for you from the heaven and the earth? Is there any god beside Allah? Say: "Bring your proof, if ye are truthful" (27:64).

That is Our argument. We gave it unto Ibrahim against his folk. We raise unto degrees of wisdom whom We will. Lo! thy Lord is Wise, Aware (6:83).

Those who wrangle concerning the revelations of Allah without any warrant that hath come unto them, it is greatly hateful in the sight of Allah and in the sight of those who believe. Thus doth Allah print on every arrogant, disdainful heart (40:35).

Lo! those who wrangle concerning the revelations of Allah without a warrant having come unto them, there is naught else in their breasts save pride which they will never attain. So take thou refuge in Allah. Lo! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer (40:56).

### *Islam is the Religion of the Inner Being*

Fayumi says, in his dictionary, *al Misbah*, that the inner being is one's heart and conscience. The human heart is mentioned in the Qur'an at over a hundred places.

Lo! therein verily is a reminder for him who hath a heart, or giveth ear with full intelligence (50:37).

The day when wealth and sons avail not (any man) Save him who bringeth unto Allah a whole heart (26:88-89).

Who have believed and whose hearts have rest in the remembrance of Allah. Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest! Those who believe and do right: Joy is for them, and bliss (their) journey's end (13:28).

Indeed, the Qur'an describes the hearts of the believers as humble and subservient to Allah, and as being pure of contamination; while it speaks of the disbelievers in terms of their possessing impure hearts, and diseased, hardened, and perverted hearts that are incapable of receiving the truth and accepting it—as if they were stagnant, so that nothing penetrates them, or rusted, so that they reflect no (spiritual) light.

### *Islam is the Religion of Freedom and Independence*

This characteristic of Islam is one that is made possible by those mentioned above (i.e. that Islam is the religion of nature, of reason and thought, of knowledge and wisdom, of evidence and proof, of the inner being). As such, Islam absolutely prohibits compulsion:

And if thy Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wouldst thou (Muhammad) compel men until they are believers? It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of Allah. He hath set uncleanness upon those who have no sense. Say: "Behold what is in the heavens and the earth! But revelations and warnings avail not folk who will not believe" (10:99-101).

These verses were intended to show that it is Allah's way to have people think for themselves, and have their own opinions and tastes, not to mention the ways they think about spirituality and religion, and the ways they interpret the signs they see; so that some will believe where others will not. Thus, the Prophet's desire that all people would come to believe in him and his message was



in fact contrary to the will of Allah that people should have different capabilities, in accordance with the different ways that they perceive things and use their minds to make sense of them.

When certain Companions of the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, wanted that their children who had converted to Judaism be ordered to stay with them, rather than join the Jews of Banu Nadir in exile, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, gave the converts the choice of maintaining their new faith, or coming to Islam.

There is no compulsion in religion (2:256).

## **The Reform of Human Society through Unification**

When Islam came into the world, humankind was widely divided; on the basis of origin, color, language, geography, religion, tribal affiliation, government, and politics. Moreover, on the basis of any one of these differences, humans went to war; even if they shared all the others with their supposed "enemies." Then Islam came along and called out loud and clear, calling humankind to a common humanity, and binding them to it so that they would no longer see their differences as reasons for enmity and aggression. Islam explained to humankind the principles on which their unity and harmony might be based.

*The First Principle:* In *Surah al Anbiya'* the Almighty addresses the community of believers, saying:

Verily, this community of yours is one community, since I am the Lord of you all: so worship (only) Me (21:92).

Then Allah explains that He has addressed all of His prophets with the same message of unity:

O you prophets! Partake of the good things of life, and do righteous deeds: verily I have full knowledge of all that you do. And, verily, this community of yours is one community, since I am the Lord of you all: so be heedful of (only) Me (23:52).

The difference was, however, that each of the earlier prophets had a particular tribe or community, whereas Muhammad, upon him be peace, was sent to all of humankind. As the Prophet of the final revelation, he was sent with a message for all people, at all times, and in all places. Allah told people, in that final revelation, that they should believe in all the prophets and their messages, and not to discriminate between them; for to have faith in the Last of the Prophets is like having faith in the first of the prophets, and all those in between the two.

*The Second Principle:* The unity of humankind may come about when there is equality between all peoples, tribes, and communities. At the final pilgrimage, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, recited the following verse:

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of , in the sight of Allah, is the best in *taqwa* (49:13),

and then said: 'No Arab is any better than a non-Arab, and no white man is any better than a black man save by means of *taqwa*!'

*The Third Principle:* The unity of religion may come about when people follow a single prophet whose teachings embody the principles of all the prophets before him.

Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear. Then those who believe in him, and honor him and help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him: they are the successful (7:157).

*The Fourth Principle:* The unity of legislation will bring about unity between all those who accept the faith of Islam, in terms of their civil rights, and the justice which guides all relations between believers and non-believers, righteous and impious, kings and street people, rich and poor, weak and strong. This will be discussed in greater detail in the Sixth of the Qur'an's Higher Purposes.

*The Fifth Principle:* The unity of faith leads to equality between all those who profess the faith of Islam and partake in its spiritual brotherhood. Its congregational worship, such as salah and hajj, gives the most eloquent of all possible pictures of this equality.

The believers are naught else than brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah that haply ye may obtain mercy (49:10).

As for the idolaters at war with the Muslims, the Qur'an says:

But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor due, then are they your brethren in religion. We detail Our revelations for a people who have knowledge (9:11).

*The Sixth Principle:* Political unity may take place when all lands adopt the Islamic way of government, and grant all citizens equal rights as members of the human family.

*The Seventh Principle:* A united and independent judicial system that guarantees the equality of every human being before the Shari'ah law. The Islamic legal system exempts the followers of other faiths from following the personal code of Islam, allowing them instead to follow their own religious codes in family and personal matters.

Listeners for the sake of falsehood! Greedy for illicit gain! If then they have recourse unto thee (Muhammad) judge between them or disclaim jurisdiction. If thou disclaimest jurisdiction, then they cannot harm thee at all. But if thou judgest, judge between them with equity. Lo! Allah loveth the equitable (5:42).

So judge between them by that which Allah hath revealed, and follow not their desires, but beware of them lest they seduce thee from some part of that which Allah hath revealed unto thee (5:49).

*The Eighth Principle:* The unification of language. The reason for this is that unity between peoples requires that they have a common mode of expression that can become the means of their cooperation and friendship. Throughout history, Islam has offered the believers this cohesive force, through its maintenance of the pure Arabic revelation in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. So that believers from all corners of the earth have a common tongue, and a means for understanding and drawing closer to one another.

Ibn 'Asakir related a hadith on the authority of Malik, from Zuhri, from Abu Salmah ibn 'Abd al Rahman who said: "Qays ibn Mutatiah went to a group in which Salman Farisi (from Persia), Suhayb Rumi (from Byzantium), and Bilal Habashi (from Abyssinia) were seated, and said: 'The tribes of Aws and Khazraj supported him [meaning the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace] but what about these? (In other words, the tribes of Aws and Khazraj are Arab, so it was natural that they should have supported Muhammad, who was an Arab like them. But why should these foreigners have supported him?).' Mu'adh ibn Jabal immediately stood up, grabbed Qays by the collar, and dragged him to the Prophet. When Mu'adh had told him, upon him be peace, what Qays had said, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, was visibly angered, and he went immediately to the mosque and gave the call to prayer. When the people had assembled, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, said, 'O people! The Lord is One! The father (Adam) is one! And the religion is one! Nor is the Arab tongue possessed by any one of you from your mother or father. It is a language, and anyone who speaks Arabic is an Arab.' Then Mu'adh stood up and asked, 'What shall I do with this hypocrite, O Prophet of Allah?' Then, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace,

replied: 'Leave him to the Fire!' And so Qays (some years later) was among those who renounced Islam, and was killed in the wars of apostasy."

If the Muslims had continued to adhere to these teachings, is it likely that the wars they fought on the basis of language or ethnicity would ever have occurred? Would they find themselves in the position of weakness they are in today? Had they taken Muhammad's teachings about brotherhood to heart, would they have fallen victim to the ills of nationalism, regionalism, and the rest? No! Never! Had they taken these teachings to heart, the brotherhood of Islam would have overspread the entire earth by now!

Islam directed its call to all of humankind, and within the first century of the Muhammadan Revelation all the peoples of the civilized world had heard about Islam, so that from the Atlantic to the Pacific people were becoming Muslims in droves. Had it not been for the aberrations in those who governed the Muslims, had it not been for their tyranny and love of power, and had it not been for the ignorance of many of those whose conversions to Islam were incomplete, the world today would be a different place, and Arabic would be spoken everywhere. But, finally, the truth will always prevail.

He sends down water from the sky, so that valleys flow according to their measure, and the flood bears (on its surface) swelling foam from that which they felt in the fire in order to make ornaments and tools rise a foam; like unto it thus Allah coins (the similitude of) the true and the false. Then, as for the foam, it passes away as scum upon the banks, while, as for that which is of use to mankind, it remains in the earth. Thus Allah coins the similitudes (13:17).

Recently, in Istanbul, a great German scholar remarked to a group of Muslims which included one of the nobles of Makkah that his government should erect a monument in a public square in Berlin to commemorate Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. When asked why, the German explained that Mu'awiyah was the one who transformed Islamic rule from its democratic principles to tribalism and

the rule of the most powerful. If Mu'awiyah had not done that, he said, Islam would have taken over the world! In that case, Germans and other Europeans today would be Arabic-speaking Muslims.

This German was so deluded by his ideas of nationalistic and ethnic superiority that he and his countrymen dragged all of Europe and its neighbors into a bloody war that ended up costing them over twenty million lives! And thousands of millions of dollars. And the final result was the utter humiliation of his homeland and its people. Yet, he persisted in his notions of racial superiority, hating the idea of coming to Islam and its unifying humanist teachings, because his German nationalism had blinded him to any other alternative. Had he considered the matter, he would surely have concluded that Islam represents the best way to bring the peoples of the world together, not their ethnic origins, or national or regional affinities. If Europe could come to this realization today, they could direct their science and technology to the betterment of the human condition. But their insistence on the superiority of their white skin, and their contempt for the rights of black-, brown-, red-, and yellow-skinned people, have led them to all manner of excesses and tyranny, and to disgrace their own civilization. Their recent exception of the yellow-skinned Japanese from their contempt serves only to further expose their hypocrisy on the matter.<sup>10</sup>

## Highlighting the Distinguishing Features of Islam

These may be summarized in the following ten principles.

*One:* Islam is the medium which brings together the rights of the body and soul, or the interests of this world and the hereafter.

Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you (2:143).

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10. The reader will remember that the author wrote these lines between the First and Second World Wars! ( trans.)

Muslims are in fact the medium between those, like the Jews, whose interests are almost entirely worldly, and those, like the Hindus and Christians, whose teachings direct them to deny the physical by tormenting the body and depriving it of its needs.

*Two:* The goal of Islam is to bring felicity to the world and the hereafter by means of purifying the soul through faith, good deeds, and high moral character; rather than by means of belief alone, or through someone else's intercession, or miracles.

*Three:* Islam seeks to bring people together in harmony, not to further emphasize their differences. This was discussed in some detail in the previous section of this chapter.

*Four:* Islam comes to facilitate matters for people, not to make them more difficult.

Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which it hath earned, and against it (only) that which it hath deserved (2:286).

Upon the world and the Hereafter. And they question thee concerning orphans. Say: "To improve their lot is best. And if ye mingle your affairs with theirs, then (they are) your brothers. Allah knoweth him who spoileth from him who improveth. Had Allah willed He could have overburdened you. Allah is Mighty, Wise" (2:220).

Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you (2:185).

And strive for Allah with the endeavor which is His right. He hath chosen you and hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship (22:78).

*Five:* Islam prohibits religious fanaticism and extremism by legitimizing all that is good, and pleasing to the eye and soul, and beautiful; so long as there is no pride involved, and no boasting.

O Children of Adam! Look to your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Lo! He loveth not the prodigals. Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of Allah which He hath brought forth for His bondmen, and the good things of His providing? Say: "Such, on the Day of Resurrection, will be only for those who believed during the life of the world." Thus do We detail Our revelations for people who have knowledge (7:31-32).

Say: "O People of the Scripture! Stress not in your religion other than the truth, and follow not the vain desires of folk who erred of old and led many astray, and erred from a plain road" (5:77).

*Six:* Islam is easy to practice and to understand. The bedouins of the desert who went to the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, and converted to Islam had no trouble in understanding its essential message, or in performing whatever was required of them. Quite often the Prophet would teach them, in a single sitting, all that they needed to know to be Muslims. In fact, this was among the most significant reasons for the rapid and widespread acceptance of Islam by people all over the world.

*Seven:* Islam divides personal responsibilities into acts which are affected by extenuating circumstances and those which are not. In either case, Muslims are free to choose whichever sort of act they please. In this way, Islam is suited to the bedouin and the philosopher, allowing each the leeway to practice as he or she deems fit.

Then We gave the Scripture as inheritance unto those whom We elected of our bondmen. But of them are some who wrong themselves and of them are some who are lukewarm and of them are some who outstrip (others) through good deeds, by Allah's leave (35:32).

*Eight:* The texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah take into consideration the various levels of intelligence and understanding among



people, as well as the differing degrees of their determination. Thus, texts admitting of sure resolutions are general in nature; whereas texts that admit of probable resolutions will be interpreted differently, in accordance with peoples' abilities and their *ijtihad*. It was for this reason that the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, used to endorse whatever legal decisions were taken by his companions.

*Nine:* Islam deals with people on the basis of tangible evidence; while intangibles are left to Allah (to deal with, on the Judgment Day). Thus, no Muslim official, ruler, judge, or *khalifah* may punish anyone on the basis of what they suspect, or even believe to be true, unless they have hard evidence to prove it.

*Ten:* The value of any act of worship rests upon its outward emulation of the example set by the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace. No one, then, may alter these practices through personal opinion or preference. The value of worship in real terms, however, is based on one's sincerity to Allah, and the correctness of one's intentions. This has been explained in innumerable verses of the Qur'an.

In fact, each of these ten principles might be considered a higher purpose of the Qur'anic revelation. And each suffices as adequate proof that the Qur'an was revealed by Allah, and that it was not the product of a young Muhammad's imagination. Rather, it came to rectify what had been corrupted by the ecclesiastical leadership of the religions which preceded it; matters of which, by the way, Muhammad could not have known anything. My purpose here is only to indicate these points briefly and move on, for brevity is the spirit of the age.

## Islamic Government and Politics

Islam is a religion of guidance, leadership, politics, and rule. This is for the reason that its reformational energies, whether directed toward the individual or society as a whole, require the power to act, and to decide, with justice, and to uphold the rights

of all, and to protect those rights from all outside influences. In order to clarify this matter, certain principles must first be explained.

### *Governance and Rule*

Rule, in Islam, is for the people, the *ummah*; its form is to be *shura*, or mutual consultation; and its leader is to the imam or *khalifah*, the one who implements the Shari'ah. The *ummah*, in turn, is to determine whether the imam stays or goes.<sup>11</sup> Allah said in regard to the characteristics of the believers:

And those who answer the call of their Lord and establish worship, and whose affairs are a matter of counsel (42:38).

Likewise, Allah commanded His Prophet, upon him be peace:

and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs (3:159).

Thus, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, used to consult his companions in every matter of importance, whether political, economic, military, or financial, if there was no clear teaching on the matter in the Qur'an. I have explained in my *tafsir* why the details of how *shura* may be achieved have been left to the *ijtihad* of the *ummah*, owing to the changing requirements of the *ummah* and its interests, with the changing of the circumstances of time and place. Otherwise, had the concept of *shura* been made conditional upon a certain organizational order, the matter would have been sealed.

Allah said:

O you who have faith! Obey Allah, and obey the Prophet, and those among you who have been entrusted with authority: and if you are at variance over any matter, refer it unto

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11. I have written on the subject of the *ummah*'s sovereignty at length in my book, *al Khilafah wa al Imamah al 'Uzma* (The Caliphate and the Greater Imamate).

Allah and the Prophet, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is the best for you, and the best interpretation (4:59).

Those in authority are those who are most competent in finding solutions to issues, whose opinions are informed, who have the best interests of the *ummah* in mind, and who enjoy the confidence and support of the *ummah*.

If any matter pertaining to peace or war should come to them (the half-hearted followers) they spread it abroad; but if they would but refer it to the Prophet, or to those from among the believers who have authority, such of them as are capable of deriving solutions would indeed know what to do (4:83).

These basic principles for governing the Islamic state represent the greatest political reform brought about by the Qur'an in an age when all the peoples of the earth were subject to one form or another of tyranny. Then, the first to put this reform into practice was the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace. In order to serve as an example to those who would come after him, the Prophet never decided a matter of importance to the *ummah* without first consulting the *ummah* or its representatives.

After the Prophet, upon him be peace, the rightly-guided caliphs followed the same policy. The *khalifah*, Abu Bakr, said in his first address to the *ummah*:

I have been given authority over you, though I am not the best among you. If I am straight with you, then give me your assistance. And if I stray, then straighten me out.

The second *khalifah*, 'Umar, said to the *ummah*: "Anyone among you who sees that I am twisted, has my permission to straighten me out." A bedouin who was in the crowd, said to him: "If I see anything twisted in you, I'll straighten it with my sword!" 'Umar replied: "All praise to Allah, that there among you those who would straighten out 'Umar with their own swords!"

The third *khalifah*, Uthman, said: "My own affairs come second to your affairs." The fourth *khalifah*, Ali, followed the same pattern, consulting with the ummah before deciding anything.

### *The Sources of Legislation in Islam*

It is well known that the sources of legislation in Islam are four: the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the consensus of the *ummah* and *ijtihad* undertaken by competent jurists

There are any number of hadiths which speak of these sources, in this order, in addition to narrations concerning how the Companions and the generations immediately following them (*tabi'in*) dealt with these matters.

Moreover, the basic principle used in *ijtihad* is derived from a hadith, narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Daud, Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah. Tirmidhi related the same on the authority of 'Amr ibn al 'As. The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, said: "When a ruler makes a correct ruling by means of *ijtihad*, he will be rewarded twice. But if he makes an incorrect ruling by means of *ijtihad*, then he will have only one reward."

### *Justice and Equality in Islam*

Since justice is the basis of legislation and the legal system, the Almighty has emphasized justice and equality throughout the Qur'an, both in the chapters revealed at Makkah and in those revealed at Madinah.

Lo! Allah enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness (16:90).

and, if ye judge between mankind, that ye judge justly (4:58).

O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah (5:8).

Thus, the Almighty commanded the Muslims to outdo themselves in regard to justice, and to ensure that their testimony in cases of legal import is given for the sake of Allah, and not for any worldly interest, even if they have to give witness against themselves, or their own kith and kin.

O ye who believe! Be ye staunch in justice, witnesses for Allah, even though it be against yourselves or (your) parents or (your) kindred, whether (the case be of) a rich man or a poor man, for Allah is nearer unto both (than ye are). So follow not passion lest ye lapse (from truth) and if ye lapse or fall away, then lo! Allah is ever Informed of what ye do (4:135).

What this verse teaches is that justice through equality is closer to *taqwa*, and thus beloved to the Almighty.

Allah it is who hath revealed the Scripture with truth, and the Balance (42:17).

We verily sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance (57:25).

Thus, the solution to the world's problems is faith in the Book which prohibits tyranny and all other forms of corruption. For the believers will avoid these things, because they know what is right and just, and because they know that retribution will be brought about by Allah both in this world and the next.

### *Islam's Prohibition of Injustice*

The principle of justice is further supported by Islam's outright prohibition of injustice, and its severe warnings, in so many verses of the Qur'an, to those who would act unjustly. The Qur'an further clarifies that only evil results from injustice, and that retribution for the unjust is a matter of surety, whether it comes sooner or later, in this world or the Hereafter, it is sure to come. And it further explains that the unjust, in reality, do injustice to themselves.

And they find all that they did confronting them, and thy Lord wrongeth no one (18:49).

If the Almighty chooses to punish the unjust in this world, one of the ways He does it is through mass destruction:

In truth thy Lord destroyed not the townships tyrannously while their folk were doing right (11:117).

And (all) those townships! We destroyed them when they did wrong, and We appointed a fixed time for their destruction (18:59).

These two examples should suffice to demonstrate the theme of so many verses in the Qur'an which deal with injustice, whether in individuals or in society.

## **Economic Reform**

I have previously explained the Qur'an's higher purposes, or its legal theory, in relation to reform of religious beliefs and practices, character and behavior, reason and thought, proof and evidence, the inner being, government and politics, the individual and society. What remains to be clarified is Islam's reformatory perspective on the major ills of society, including: the tyranny of wealth and its empire, the evils of war, the oppression of women, and the enslavement of human beings. Clearly, the health of human society depends on the eradication of these evils, and no reform is possible without the cooperation of reason and religion. I shall deal with these matters here very briefly, beginning with a look at wealth.

### *Wealth as a Trial*

The basic principle expounded by the Qur'an in regard to wealth is that it is a trial and a test for humankind in their worldly lives, for wealth can be a means to either reform or corruption, good or evil, piety or impiety. Wealth is something that people compete over, both in its acquisition and in the ways they spend it, or

keep it, or maintain it as the domain of the wealthy elite, or circulate in the interests of the common welfare. Wealth is, moreover, the cause of enmity between individuals and groups; yet it also has the power to bring individuals and groups together. Certain social scientists have even come to the conclusion that wealth is responsible for everything in history, for every revolution, whether social, political, or religious, including Islam! I have dealt with that subject, refuting this preposterous claim, in my commentary on the Qur'an, so I will not repeat it here.

Our scholars have not given the subject of wealth its due, and the mountain of western literature on the subject has done nothing but lead to the further corruption of humankind. Even so, the treatment for all of this may be found in the verses of the Qur'an.

Assuredly ye will be tried in your property and in your persons, and ye will hear much wrong from those who were given the Scripture before you, and from the idolaters. But if ye persevere and ward off (evil), then that is of the steadfast heart of things (3:186.)

Sulayman said: This is of the bounty of my Lord, that He may try me whether I give thanks or am ungrateful (27:40).

And it is not your wealth nor your children that will bring you near unto Us, but he who believeth and doeth good (he draweth near). As for such, theirs will be twofold reward for what they did (34:37).

That which ye give in usury in order that it may increase on (other) people's property hath no increase with Allah; but that which ye give in charity, seeking Allah's countenance, hath increase manifold (30:39).

Beautified for mankind is love the joys (that come) from women and offspring, and stored up heaps of gold and silver, and horses branded (with their mark), and cattle and land. That is comfort of the life of the world. Allah! With Him is a more excellent abode (3:14).

And know that your possessions and your children are a test, and that with Allah is immense reward (8:28).

Your wealth and your children are only a temptation, whereas Allah! with Him is an immense reward (64:15).

Wealth and children are an ornament of life of the world. But the good deeds which endure are better in thy Lord's sight for reward, and better in respect of hope (18:46).

Lo! We have placed all that is in the earth as an ornament thereof that we may try them: which of them is best in conduct (18:8).

Many verses of the Qur'an link felicity with the spending of one's wealth for good, and misery with one's failure to do so.

Spend your wealth for the cause of Allah, and be not cast by your own hands to ruin (2:195).

Lo! your effort is dispersed (toward divers ends). As for him who giveth and is dutiful (toward Allah) and believeth in goodness; surely We will ease his way unto the state of ease. But as for him who hoardeth and deemeth himself independent, and disbelieveth in goodness; surely We will ease his way unto adversity. His riches will not save him when he perisheth (92:4-11).

### *Condemnation of the Improper Uses of Wealth*

The Almighty said, in *Surah al 'Alaq*:

Nay, verily man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient (96:6-7).

In other words, it is true that humans will transgress the limits of truth, justice, and virtue when they consider themselves wealthy, and in no need of assistance, so that they spend their wealth on



their own pleasures, rather than give a part of it to help others, to please the Almighty, and to earn a reward in the Hereafter. This particular verse, and several others, were revealed in reference to certain of the wealthy tribesmen of Quraysh who stood in opposition to the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, and his mission.

Lo! those who disbelieve spend their wealth in order that they may debar (men) from the way of Allah. They will spend it, then it will become an anguish for them, then they will be conquered. And those who disbelieve will be gathered unto hell (8:36).

### *Censure of Avarice*

And let not those who hoard up that which Allah hath bestowed upon them of His bounty think that it is better for them. Nay, it is worse for them. That which they hoard will be their collar on the Day of Resurrection (3:180).

Urging Muslims to spend in the way of Allah, the Qur'an says:

Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty, and commands you to commit abominations (2:268),

where the meaning of abominations, *al fahsha'*, is niggardliness. In other words, Satan will prevent people from spending in the way of Allah by telling them they will become poor if they spend.

And serve Allah. Ascribe no thing as partner unto Him. (Show) kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and into the neighbor who is of kin (unto you) and the neighbor who is not of kin and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer and (the slaves) whom your right hands possess. Lo! Allah loveth not such as are proud and boastful, Who hoard their wealth and enjoin avarice on others, and hide that which Allah hath bestowed upon them of His bounty. For disbelievers We prepare a shameful doom (4:36-37).

And of them is he who made a covenant with Allah (saying): "If He give us of His bounty We will give alms and become of the righteous." Yet when He gave them of His bounty, they boarded it and turned away, averse (9:75-76)

Lo! ye are those who are called to spend in the way of Allah, yet among you there are some who hoard. And as for him who hoardeth, he hoardeth only from his soul. And Allah is the Rich, and ye are the poor. And if ye turn away He will exchange you for some other folk, and they will not be the likes of you (47:38).

### *Praise of Wealth for Good*

He will let loose the sky for you in plenteous rain (71:11).

He will cause the sky to rain abundance on you and will add unto you strength to your strength (11:52).

If ye fear poverty (from the loss of their merchandise) Allah shall preserve you of His bounty if He will (9:28).

If Allah knoweth any good in your hearts He will give you better than that which hath been taken from you, and will forgive you (8:70).

And when your Lord proclaimed:" If ye give thanks, I will give you more; but if ye are thankless, lo! my punishment is dire" (14:7).

### *Care of Wealth*

And those who, when they spend, are neither prodigal nor grudging; and there is ever a firm station between the two (25:67).

Let him who hath abundance spend of his abundance, and he whose provision is measured, let him spend of that

which Allah hath given him. Allah asketh naught of any soul save that which He hath given it. Allah will vouchsafe, after hardship, ease (65:7).

Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and squander not (thy wealth) in wantonness (17:26).

If Muslims would pay attention to the teachings of these verses they would never need to consult another book on the subject of protecting their wealth, and hardly a poor person would be found among them!

### *Spending in the Way of Allah*

Yet, if ye obey Allah and His messenger, He will not withhold from you aught of (the reward of) your deeds. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. The (true) believers are those only who believe in Allah and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah. Such are the sincere (49:14-15).

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Scripture and the Prophets; and giveth his wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere (2:177).

Say: "If your fathers, and your sons, and your brethren, and your wives, and your tribe, and the wealth ye have acquired, and merchandise for which ye fear that there will be no sale, and dwellings ye desire are dearer to you than Allah and His messenger and striving in His way: then wait till Allah bringeth His command to pass" (9:24).

Those of the believers who sit still, other than those who have a (disabling) hurt, are not on an equality with those who strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and lives. Allah hath conferred on those who strive with their wealth and lives a rank above the sedentary. Unto each Allah hath promised good, but He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary (4:95).

Who is it that will lend unto Allah a goodly loan, so that He may give it increase manifold? Allah straiteneth and enlargeth (2:245).

If ye lend unto Allah a goodly loan, He will double it for you and will forgive you, for Allah is Responsive, Clement (64:17).

How discouraging, then, is it for us today to see that the Muslim peoples of the world are the ones who spend the least on doing good for the needy and afflicted, whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

## **The Reform of Conflict**

Conflict between people over wealth and property is a part of human nature. That these conflicts should sometimes lead to open confrontation and violence between peoples and nations is part of life in society, if not an essential element. Warfare may be one means among many for the development of a better civilization. For example, in cases where the conflict is between truth and falsehood, or between knowledge and ignorance, a victory for truth or knowledge will certainly benefit civilization. The same is true for conflict between order and anarchy, or between rectitude and corruption.

Nay, but We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it crushes the latter: and lo! it withers away (21:18).

In one of the results of such an example, the Almighty said:

In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood; for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth (13:17).

Moreover, open conflict over purely material ends, or out of a thirst for power and domination, will result in no good at all. It can only lead to misery for humanity and to hatred and mistrust between peoples. In our own times, the peoples of the world have been subjected to the worst sort of conflict, even to the point where civilization itself was at stake, given the kinds of weapons that have come into use; poison gas, machine guns, and bombs dropped from airplanes on populated cities, so that entire populations of men, women, and children, can be exterminated in minutes.<sup>12</sup>

The warring nations themselves, after the war, are now the most anxious of all to ensure that such a conflict should never again occur; so that those with the greatest capability for raining destruction on others, those with the mightiest fleets, the strongest armies, and the most numerous airforces, are the most fearful of all for the safety of their own people, and thus spend incredible amounts on ensuring the defense of their national borders. Their statesmen are constantly looking for new treaties to sign, new alliances to enter into, and new ways to avoid the outbreak of hostilities. Even so, these are the same people who plot and conspire to break today what they swore to yesterday.

Hence be not like her who breaks and unravels the yarn which she has herself spun and made strong—by using your oaths as a means to deceive one another, simply because some of you may be more powerful than others (13:92).

The teaching of the Qur'an on this subject is that treaties and pacts between nations and peoples must have as their objective the

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12. Here again, the author is speaking only of the atrocities of the First World War. (trans).

reform and welfare of society so that justice may prevail. Such treaties can only come about if the parties to them are sincere, and free of deceit and duplicity.

If the statesmen of the world truly desired peace for their nations, and deliverance from the dangers of world war, they need look no further than Islam! In what follows, I shall list some of the most important teachings of Islam on the subject of war and peace.

### *One: The Prohibition Against Initiating Hostilities*

Muslims are commanded to stand up to aggressors, so as to check their aggression, avoid the consequences of defeat, and uphold the general welfare. This command is given in concert with a prohibition against their initiating aggression, or instigating any sort of violence or tyranny.

Fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression—for, verily, Allah does not love aggressors (2:190).

The reason given in the verse for the prohibition against initiating aggression—that Allah does not like the aggressor—is a clear indication that this prohibition is a firm one and beyond abrogation. This is why I have explained in my work of Qur'anic commentary that the wars fought by the Prophet, upon him be peace, against the disbelieving idolaters were defensive in nature, and had not a single element of aggression in them. In my commentary on the verse of the sword (9:5) in the ninth chapter, I noted that the fighting against the Arab idolaters who had broken their treaty after the liberation of Makkah was based on the same principles. Even so, the policies of Islam in regard to the Arab tribes were quite other than its policies toward non-Arabs, for the design of Islam was to convert the Arabs and free them from the yoke of paganism, thereby purifying the entire Arabian peninsula of the influence of idolatry and transforming it into a safe haven for Islam. The policy of Islam with all others was to allow them to continue to live in the places they chose to live and to worship in the ways they chose to worship.

### *Two: The Purpose of War*

The positive objective of war, after curbing aggression and restoring order, is to protect the followers of all religions from oppression and forceful conversion, to ensure that Muslims worship Allah and no other, to elevate His word, to maintain the freedom to call to Islam, and to be able to implement the Shari'ah, which is in fact in the interests of all of humankind.

To those against whom war is made permission is given (to fight) because they are wronged and verily Allah is Most powerful for their aid. (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right (for no cause) except that they say "Our Lord is Allah." Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another there would surely have been pulled down monasteries churches synagogues and mosques in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His (cause); for verily Allah is Full of Strength Exalted in Might (Able to enforce His Will) Aware of those who, if We empower them on earth, remain constant in *salah*, give *zakah*, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and with Allah remains the outcome of all events (22:39-40).

In giving permission to the Muslims to go to war, the Almighty explained that there were three reasons for doing so: a) They were oppressed and their persons were in danger; they had been turned out of their own homes and stripped of their wealth for the sake of their faith. In other words, they had personal and religious grounds for taking up arms; b) there was a real danger that if the Muslims did not meet force with force there might have been no one left to worship God, and no place to do so either; and c) the purpose of empowering the believers on earth is to ensure that *salah* is established and *zakah* is distributed, all of which are acts that purify the individual and society.

It may be true that nearly all countries which go to war explain that their reasons for doing so are noble and just. But their deeds

will always give them away, for power nearly always brings corruption.

### *Three: Peace Must Always Come Before War*

This teaching is based on the two which preceded it, as they explain that war becomes an option only under certain circumstances; otherwise, peace is the natural state of affairs for people and society. It is for this reason that the Almighty commanded that the way of peace should be chosen if the aggressor agrees to it.

But if they incline to peace, then you too incline to it, and place your trust in Allah (8:61).

### *Four: Readiness for War*

Muslims must remain in a state of preparedness for war, by taking whatever measures are appropriate for their situation. The purpose of this preparedness is that it should act as a deterrent against aggression by making the potential aggressor think twice about attacking people with the ability to retaliate in kind. In this way, Muslims may live their lives with a sense of security, knowing that their families, wealth, reputation, and religious freedom are secure and free of harm.

Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster, so that you might deter thereby the enemies of Allah, who are your enemies as well (8:60).

### *Five: Mercy toward One's Enemies*

If victory is given to the Muslims on the battlefield so that, after their sacrifice and struggle, the Muslims need no longer fear the aggression of the enemy, they may break off hostilities. If they have taken prisoners, they have two choices: they may send them back to their people, or they may keep them for ransom.

When you meet in war those who are bent on denying the truth, smite their necks until you overcome them fully, and



then tighten their bonds; but thereafter [set them free] either by an act of grace or for ransom, so that the burden of war may be lifted (47:4).

## The Liberation of Women

Before Islam women were oppressed, enslaved, and degraded by all people, in every society, and in every legal system, even among the Christians and the Jews. But, with the advent of Islam, Allah completed His religion by sending His Final Messenger, Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings. Then, by means of the Book revealed to the Messenger, and by means of his Sunnah as well, Allah granted to women the same rights He had guaranteed for men; while taking into consideration the differences between the two sexes, in terms of their biological makeup and their roles in society. I shall deal briefly, in what follows, with certain of the most significant reforms brought about by Islam in relation to women.

*One:* Certain cultures, including some in the West, considered women chattel or the instruments of the devil, and not actually human. The Qur'an, however, clarified this very basic matter:

O people! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female (49:13).

O humankind! Heed your Lord who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women (4:1).

*Two:* Certain cultures, including some in the West, thought that women were not qualified to practice religion. When Islam came, however, it addressed itself to both men and women, mentioning each in the Qur'an, and speaking in terms of "believing men" and "believing women."

*Three:* Certain cultures, including some in the West, thought that women did not possess souls. The Qur'an clarified this matter in the following manner:

If any do deeds of righteousness be they male or female and have faith they will enter heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them (4:123-124).

And their Lord hath accepted of them and answered them: "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you be he male or female: ye are members one of another (3:195).

*Four:* Certain cultures, including some in the West, thought that since women were not the equals of men, they should not be included in their religious, social, financial, political, or any other sort of activities. The Qur'an treated this attitude in the following way:

The believers men and women are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers practice regular charity and obey Allah and His apostle. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power Wise. Allah hath promised to believers men and women gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss in the Good Pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity (9:71-72).

*Five:* Certain cultures, including some in the West, prohibited women from the right to inherit, or to possess wealth, or to spend as they saw fit. Islam, however, established these rights for women, and legislated to uphold them.

From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women whether the property be small or large a determinate share (4:7).

*Six:* Marriage among bedouin tribes and certain civilized societies was little more than slavery for women. Islam came and made of marriage a religious institution, entered into by means of a religious and civil contract, and having as its goals the felicity of both husband and wife, the establishment of the family unit as the main pillar in Muslim society, the establishment of relations between the

families of the husband and the wife, and the increase of love and caring among family members and beyond to the society as a whole.

And among His Signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts); verily in that are Signs for those who reflect (30:21).

*Seven:* The Qur'an ensured the equitable distribution of rights and responsibilities between men and women.

In accordance with justice, the rights of wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regard to them (2:228).

*Eight:* The teachings of Islam in regard to respect for parents are very clear. In fact, the Qur'an teaches that such respect is in fact an act of worship. The Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, emphasized over and again the rights of mothers, and taught that a mother's rights are greater than a father's. The Prophet, furthermore, taught a great deal about the need to educate girls.

In summary, there is no other religion, or belief system, or legal system that has guaranteed for women more than Islam has; not in terms of respect, or rights, or care.

## **The Abolishment of Slavery**

The enslavement of the weak by the powerful is something that has taken place among all the peoples of the world since the beginning of history. The ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Indians, Romans, and Arabs kept slaves for the most difficult of tasks, dealing with them in the cruelest manner possible. Even so, Christianity and Judaism condoned slavery. In fact, slavery remained a thriving institution among the Europeans until the Americans finally abolished it near the end of the nineteenth century. Then the English began to abolish the slave trade worldwide. In neither case, however, were their actions the result of a sincere desire

to promote the welfare of humankind. Rather, they did so as the result of their own particular self-interests; and not because they had any real understanding of equality. After all, in America the white descendants of Europeans continue to exploit the red Indians who originally inhabited the continent, in continuation of the system of political slavery considered legitimate by every European government and the European peoples who see nothing wrong in the oppression by whites of any people of a different color; even to the point of their going outside the law to discriminate against and even punish them. The British do the same thing in their colonies, in India for example, though recently the Indians have had some success in taming the British ego.<sup>13</sup> The other European colonialists are no better.<sup>14</sup> In fact, their prejudice is so great that none of them will agree to pray in the same churches that the "natives" pray in.

When the light of Islam appeared on the horizon of world history, one of the first things it set out to do was to abolish the injustice and suffering caused by slavery. Islam gave people laws that paved the way for the abolition of slavery by degrees, yet in a way that would not cause further suffering. For, in view of the circumstances of society at the time, it was impossible to do away with slavery all at once. To do so would have had negative effects both on the slaveholders and the slaves themselves. To illustrate this point, we need only to turn to recent history to see that when the slaves were emancipated in America, for example, many of those who had been set free were forced by hunger to return to their masters for employment. In Sudan, likewise, the British had to allow many of the slaves they had set free to return to their masters, though they did so on the condition that they could not be sold or traded. Had they not done so, great numbers of the former slaves would have perished.

This is a clear illustration that the abolishment of slavery, which was so widespread and such an integral part of society, could not

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13. In the year this was written, 1934, a scandal was brewing in England because an Indian student at Oxford had been elected by his peers to the presidency of the student union.

14. At the time this was written the Europeans were all over the Muslim world; Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

possibly take place all at once, as the result of a religious decree. That would have been neither wise nor practical, for it would have caused untold suffering. The legal system of Islam is foremost a practical system of justice that combines the interests of society in general with human mercy. Moreover, the Prophet of Allah, upon him be peace, was the most merciful of all humankind; and he was himself responsible for the emancipation of scores of men and women slaves even before his prophetic mission began. His wife Khadija was also well-known for her buying and freeing of slaves. Even so, some of those she bought preferred to stay with her, and her husband, upon him be peace, rather than go away as free men or women. Much the same was true of Abu Bakr who spent nearly all of his money buying slaves, just so that he could set them free.

In general, Islam dealt with slavery by placing limitations on enslavement (i.e. limiting the ways that previously free people could be turned into slaves) and by legislating ways for slaves to gain their freedom, without causing harm to themselves or to others.

*The First Way:* Islam prohibited the practice, prevalent among nearly all peoples of those times, of the powerful using any means to enslave the weak. Islam limited enslavement to prisoners of war who had taken up arms against Muslims, and then only on the condition that the war in which they fought was not one of aggression begun by Muslims, but a just war in which Muslims fought in accordance with guidelines dictated by the Shari'ah. Such strict conditions for enslavement had never before been stipulated by any religion or civilization in history, much less among the Arab tribes who knew no law or code of ethics before Islam. I do not mean to imply that by setting these conditions that Islam intended to legitimize everything about slavery that others had legitimized for themselves. Not at all. Rather, what Islam did was to give the Muslim leadership the choice to do what they considered best for their people; either to continue with slavery in a limited way, and for a limited time, or to do away with it by degrees. In fact, in relation to prisoners of war, Muslims had two choices: either to grant them their freedom, as an act of charity and good will toward them, or to ransom them in exchange for either money or Muslim prisoners.

Therefore when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight) smite at their necks; at length when ye have thoroughly subdued them bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been Allah's Will He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you some with others. But those who are slain in the way of Allah He will never let their deeds be lost (40:4).

If we consider this matter closely, we will notice that since Muslims are given the choice to set the prisoners free or to ransom them, they have no third option, i.e., to keep them as slaves. But since slavery was practiced among all the nations of earth in those times, Islam went along with it to the extent mentioned above. (Owing to the fact that many nations and tribes would only return Muslim prisoners in exchange for prisoners of their own, and not for money.) Thus, for Muslims to set prisoners free in every instance, while the enemies of Islam made their Muslim prisoners into slaves under the worst possible conditions, would have been an open invitation to disaster. In any case, the legal ruling of the verse is open to interpretation by the Muslim leadership; if they feel that it is safe and appropriate to set their prisoners free in exchange for nothing, they may do so. And if they feel it inappropriate, or contrary to the interests of Muslims, then they have the right to do otherwise.

The Sunnah or the example of the Prophet, upon him be peace, for all Muslims was to set his prisoners free. This is exactly what he did after the battles of Bani Mustalaq, Hunayn, and the liberation of Makkah. The books of history and *sirah* record that in each case, the enemies took no Muslims prisoner. Thus, the spirit of the Shari'ah in these matters should be understood as favoring kindness and forgiveness, when circumstances allow, even toward aggressors.

*The Second Way:* Islamic law provides for the emancipation of slaves by four different methods. These are as follow:

*The First Method: Legal Principles*

1. Islam considers freedom to be the natural state of all human beings.

2.. Islam prohibits the enslavement of anyone other than those who are taken prisoner in wars of aggression against Muslims.

3. The law of Islam allows a slave to buy his own freedom, by paying over a period of time, or all at once. This is known in legal terms as *al mukatabah* ( agreement on a deed of freedom).<sup>15</sup> A hadith in al Bukhari's collection of authentic hadiths, mentions that Anas had a slave named Sirin who was a good man and had earned a good sum of money. When Sirin requested a deed of freedom, Anas refused. At that, Sirin went to the Caliph, 'Umar, and complained. So 'Umar called Anas and told him to grant Sirin the deed. When Anas refused, 'Umar had him whipped. Then 'Umar quoted the verse: "Write it [the deed of freedom] for them, if you are aware of any good in them" (24:33). So Anas relented and wrote the deed.<sup>16</sup>

4. When slaves cross over from non-Muslim to Muslim territory, they automatically become free, and the Islamic government grants them rights as full citizens.

5. If a slave is owned by more than one person, and one of the owners sets his/her portion of the slave free, then the slave will go free. The owner who freed the slave then becomes responsible for paying off the remaining portion to his/her partner or partners.

6. If a slave is disfigured by his/her owner, he/she will be entitled to freedom.

7 If a slave is abused by his/her owner, the owner must pay for his/her transgression by freeing the slave. Imams Ahmad, Muslim, and Abu Daud related a hadith on the authority of Abd Allah ibn 'Umar that the Prophet, upon him be peace, said: "Whoever beats, or even slaps, a slave, will have to set him/her free."

8. Owners of slaves may stipulate that their slave(s) are to be freed when they, the owners, die. This is called *tadbir*. The legal literature on the subject is quite vast.

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15. See Qur'an 24:33 and its commentaries for more details on this matter.

16. Sirin was the father of Ibn Sirin, the well-known scholar of the successor generation.

9. Women slaves who give birth to children by their masters are set free when their masters die. And their masters may not thereafter sell them to another. Moreover, their children are born free.

10. Anyone who comes to possess any of his/her relations will have to set them free.

*The Second Method: Kaffarah or Legal Expiation:*

The legal expiation offered by Muslims in atonement for their sins is of three kinds:

1. Obligatory Emancipation: In cases of accidental murder, *zihar* (where one declares that one's wife is as legally prohibited as one's mother; a prohibited form of separation - trans.), and the intentional breaking of fast (under certain conditions, all of which are recorded in the works of *fiqh*).

2. Obligatory, but with a choice: In the case of expiation for a broken oath. Thus, one who breaks an oath, either by word or deed, has to either feed ten poor people, or clothe them, or free a slave.

3. Recommended: In expiation of unspecified sins and acts of wrongdoing. This is the best of all the three categories, in the sense that it will earn the greatest reward with Allah.

*The Third Method: Zakah*

Among the eight categories on which *zakah* monies may legally be spent is the category of emancipation; either directly, or by means of contributing to the slave's deed of emancipation, (*mukatabah*, mentioned above).

*The Fourth Method: Emancipation as an Act of Worship*

There are innumerable texts from the Qur'an and the Sunnah which encourage Muslims to emancipate slaves and thereby earn for themselves great rewards in the hereafter.

*A Note on the Emancipation of Non-Muslim Slaves*

When Islam recognizes the right of human beings to freedom, it does so in recognition that all human beings share in this right,



regardless of their status as believers or disbelievers. Thus, wherever the Shari'ah speaks of emancipation, it does so in general terms; so that it extends to both Muslim and non-Muslim slaves. In one case, however, the requirement is that the slave be Muslim; and that is the case of the accidental murder of a Muslim. In that case, the idea behind this requirement is that the life of a believer be recompensed by the emancipation (which is itself a way of giving life) of another believer. There are many hadiths to attest to this point, and it was widely agreed upon by the jurists.

## **A Summary of this Study**

Go back and consider our discussions of revelation, prophethood, the miracles of the prophets as understood by the Christians and as we understand them, the doubts concerning inspiration and "personal" revelation, the inimitability of the Qur'an, and the worldwide revolution brought about by the Muhammadan Revelation. Then, add to that the ten higher purposes of the Qur'an for the reform of the individual and society, and the spiritual, economic, political, and social legislation brought by Islam.

Go back and consider all of that, sentence by sentence and word by word. Without doubt, you will find your mind coming inevitably to the conclusion that no human being, and certainly no uneducated person, could possibly have brought so much to humankind on his own; unless he was guided by divine revelation. By means of the message he brought, all of Arabia was transformed; and only a few years later, all of the civilized world underwent historical changes.

Even more amazing for us today is the realization that the world has never been in greater need of that message, despite the progress, technology, and sophistication of modern society. In view of all of these things there can be no doubt that the message to humankind brought by Muhammad, upon him be peace, was divinely revealed, and of direct and lasting relevance to everyone who hears it.

Say: "Know, that the final evidence [of all truths] rests with Allah alone; and he He so willed, He would have guided you all aright" (7:149).

# الوحى الجسمى

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Muhammadan Revelation discusses revelation, prophethood, the miracles of the prophets as understood by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the inimitability or I'jaz of the Qur'anic text, and the worldwide revolution brought about by the prophet of Islam, upon him be peace, and his teachings.

Add to that, the ten higher purposes of the Qur'an for the reform of the individual and society... and then a study of the spiritual, economic, political, and social legislation brought by Islam... and you have the contents of this epochal work.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The name, Muhammad Rashid Rida is very well known throughout the Muslim World. Many of Rida's work have been published and republished all over the Arab-speaking world: making Rashid Rida a household name, and one that comes immediately to mind when the reformational efforts of the early twentieth century are recalled. But, like the work of his well known teacher, Muhammad Abduh, Rida's work has remained available only to those who can read Arabic. Clearly the purpose of the author in writing this book was to promote understanding of Islam and its Prophet, upon him be peace, through an appeal to the followers of all "revealed" religions to view these issues from the perspective of a shared or common doctrinal ground- that of divine revelation.



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